THE TAKER

Daniel Carson Goodman

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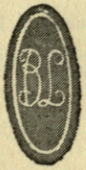
BY

DANIEL CARSON GOODMAN



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TO
ALMA RUBENS

2135924 I

OTHER NOVELS

By DANIEL CARSON GOODMAN

UNCLOTHED

HAGAR REVELLY

THE TAKER

"Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds"

THE TAKER

CHAPTER I

MRS. VERNON stopped her writing, suddenly arose from the chair, and with her deep-set eyes cast ahead, as if seeking release from painful thoughts, walked slowly across the room to the window. All the time she moaned: "Oh, what will become of me?"

She had the appearance of one in whose life a rent had been torn, like one of those widening chasms made when a river of ice suddenly breaks.

Then the door opened and there came in from the hall a fat, waddling person, aged about fifty. Her sandy, unkempt hair showed grey streaks and was pulled back straight from her forehead, which left a jagged line close over her brow, while a greasy apron, spanning tight across her thighs, looked like the protector embalmers use.

"The butcher's here, Mrs. Vernon," the servant said calmly. "Won't leave any meat unless we pay him. What am I to say?"

Mrs. Vernon's figure became even more rigid. Then she glanced unhappily at the woman and answered with a dull, wearied voice:

"Oh, Mattie, tell him——" As the servant placidly waited, Mrs. Vernon halted and turned away wearily as if searching for some way out. But her pain-ridden

thoughts seemed incapable of meeting the situation. "Say —I'll stop in and see them—say anything."

When she walked over to the window and sadly gazed out onto the lawn, the servant muttered to herself a sonorous lamentation: "Poor woman, poor thing——" as if to ease her own conscience from any further need for sympathy. Glancing pathetic-eyed at the dark figure silhouetted in the window's sunlight, she left the room.

But Mrs. Vernon could hear the derisive comment that came from the man's lips at the kitchen door, a comment made more poignant at the moment by an odor that floated up, as of old pork or of fried onions left to burn on its skillet.

Wrapped in a silent reverie, Mrs. Vernon stood at the open window for some time, while the heat from the glaring July sun, penetrating past her into the room, vibrated almost visibly in its first vigour of summer, brooding in waves from the ceiling and floor and from the fresh varnish that streaked the old furniture.

In fact, everything in the room was old and time-worn; showing a painful blending of want with carefulness, remnants of better days voicing the pathetic symphony concerning the Vernons, mother and son, familiar to the ears of nearly every one in Elyria. The spindle-legged mahogany desk with its splintered roller top thrown back and fixed by the years, cried out its squeaky protest at the faintest touch; the worn green Turkish rug in the centre of the room made a dry cracking sound like parched grass, at her slightest tread; even the lace curtains at the window lent a brittle murmur as Mrs. Vernon crunched them in her rigid fingers . . . a heart-breaking melody, indeed, bowed to the very apparent dis-

cords made by money lost and vain striving to keep up appearances.

Only the many pictures of an attractive, sensitive looking boy in varying poses and years, hanging in gilt frames about the room, proved that one interest had not dimmed and that to it Mrs. Vernon had been devoted with all a mother's love and constancy.

Here the resemblance between mother and son was strikingly marked. There were the same large, deep-set eyes, with a dreamy spark in them, the same perfect, though weak, chiselling of the nose and mouth and chin.

It was after a long spell of despairing thought, which many saddening days had forced to become as a second nature in her, that Mrs. Vernon walked back to the desk and again took up the unfinished letter. A half-dozen times at least she started to write on it, hesitated, tore it up entirely and then started afresh, though always she had the resolution in her mind to tell all and open her heart without reserve. And at last she went on without the earlier hesitancy.

Just an occasional sob choking itself in her throat or the nervous scratching of her pen as it fitfully moved across the white paper, told the unhappiness of her task.

She wrote:

ELYRIA, OHIO.

"JUDGE DAVID TALBOTT,
"165 BROADWAY,
"NEW YORK CITY.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"My boy is just breaking his mother's heart. The most terrible stories come to me from all sides. I can't believe that my own child would do any of the things I hear, in his right senses.

"You are my oldest friend and know conditions so well,

here in Elyria, yet I hesitate to inflict my troubles on you. I really wouldn't, did I not feel it impossible to hold out any longer.

"I hardly know how to start writing you about it. I have had at least half a dozen anonymous letters about him, although I can trace pretty well where they come from. I suppose I must go right to the point. Well, it concerns Victoria Leeds. Perhaps you remember the family. She was a Harrison before she married. Anyway, it is nearly too much to bear. She must be a very foolish, thoughtless woman to play with my boy this way. Only this morning the Thompsons called me up to tell me that she was seen with him last night at a place out on the State Road, drinking and dancing. It was months ago, too, that I tried to make Leonard give up his phaeton. I see now why he wouldn't listen to me. Even when I told him in what circumstances we were. Anyhow, I believe what people tell me, my dear friend. And just a few minutes ago, when I started to reprimand him about it, he turned on me like some wild animal. He is in the next room now. I hardly know what he'll do when he comes out.

"At least, he is actually forcing me to leave Elyria. I can't stand the disgrace of it all in the place where our family has gone on for so long.

"I can't help feeling that this is the end of us. Since Francis died, everything has gone wrong. We are entirely dependent now on the money from the rents here—it comes to about $3300 a year. Think of it, my friend, when we had so very much to be thankful for. Yes, it's sad indeed—whenever I think of what we had when he was with us. All the cash from his insurance has vanished as well as what was left in the bank. Everything is proving to me now how weak and foolish I am when it comes to running my life."

It was difficult to put down on paper all she wanted to say. A longing rose in her soul to tell it to some one aloud, so that the tears could be released, to ease up the

stifling feeling that choked her. She controlled herself, however, though as she wrote, tears, again and again, fell on the back of her hand or onto the letter.

"I have so wanted Leonard to grow up and be a fine son. All his life he has been to me just my second self. I wanted him to know a lot of girls of good family and have him eventually marry some day, so that I could be proud of him. I have just waited to see all this happen and waited, I suppose, to see my own youth born again. Or at least, get through him what really never happened to me.

"Instead of all this, he has queer, startling ideas. And he is so precocious and wilful and won't study.

"What a fool a mother is, after all. You know, I've tried to keep myself looking young, just so I could be chums with him. It makes me choke—writing it out for you like this."

Then she stopped, suddenly assailed with the idea that she must not go on in this manner. A mother was complaining to an outsider, against her own flesh and blood, though the conviction shot through her that she had always been like this, giving in too readily.

Reflecting for some minutes, while her idle pen tore away crumb after crumb of the blue blotting paper, Mrs. Vernon's aching thoughts suddenly were stilled by the presence of Leonard, who appeared in the doorway, coldly regarding her. The boy's soft felt hat, pulled down recklessly over his head, apparently had been put on with some certain idea of defiance.

While Mrs. Vernon guiltily placed her handkerchief over the letter, he said coldly:

"I suppose you're complaining to some one about me, aren't you?" His lips were pressed close and she could easily outline the tightly clenched hands, dug so deeply in his coat pockets.

When his mother failed to answer Leonard went on impetuously, each word with a lash in it:

"Oh, I think you are terribly foolish, mother. You don't seem to know that times have changed—that a boy nearly eighteen has some right to think for himself." He added pointedly: "Well, it's no use for us to fight twice in the same day. The one sure thing is—I'm just sick of all this—I'm going to New York to get some sort of a job." He stared insolently at her for some time, then went on hotly again. "Yes, I'm going to New York, I'm going to New York." And now his mother heard a taunt in his words that held her rigid with amazement. "I suppose you think it's a fine thing for a young man to go to Elyria's Best School for Boys and then to some fresh water college, the way you want me to do. Good God, mother, every time I have gone in the gate this whole last year I've had to laugh. Then another thing." His brows became furrowed with thought. "I've been looking over the future of some of Elyria's graduates and there's hardly a one who has stayed in this town who isn't just clerking or bookkeeping or something like that." He added earnestly: "Yes, I think I'm going to get out into the world and make money. This sketching and painting that they're teaching me will get me about twenty a week if I live long enough."

Just as he was on the verge of continuing his attack Mrs. Vernon interrupted, saying in a whispered, broken voice:

"Leonard, dear, you are not old enough yet—to know what is right—or wrong. If you were a good, loving son you would listen to me and take for granted that what I wanted for you was for the best."

It seemed difficult for her to word all she had in mind,

for he hardly listened. Though as she watched him a half dozen or more reasons for argument scurried through her mind.

Suddenly there was a restless toss of his head and a survey of her that showed cold and impassionate in the deep blue eyes. He turned toward the door, saying: "Oh, what's the use trying to explain? It wouldn't do any good, you know. You'd never understand me, you're so—damned old-fashioned."

There came a short lull as he stopped with his eyes toward the shadows of the hall. When he turned and came back into the room his face revealed with a new strength the antagonism that had come over him. Suddenly, for the first time in her thirty-six years of life, she felt a resentment forming deep in her, not so much against the wilful child standing so defiantly in front of her, but more against the hateful spirit gnawing its way through the young mind and heart.

With a sort of horror the woman looked at him, as before her eyes there seemed to be creeping a vague, undefinable mass, crowding in at her boy's handsome throat and face, at the mouth and eyes, as if to crush out the love that was hidden there away from her.

So it was that a frantic feeling encompassed her, come now out of the many months of submissive thinking, voluntary isolation, and her frail neurotic grasping at life; a desire suddenly frenzied, to get her fingers on this antagonist and tear it away from the flesh which was hers.

In another moment Mrs. Vernon lost control. With a mad bound, holding the young boy transfixed with fright, her clenched fingers hysterically grasped at his face and shoulders.

And she cried, as the pale, delicate-faced Leonard, bewildered by this sudden attack, fought her off:

"I'll kill it first—it won't destroy his love for me. It won't—it won't, I say."

Only after Leonard had torn himself loose and with an infuriated yell shouted, "You'll never strike me again, I'll leave here—to-night," did the mother finally come to her senses.

And while the boy ran out of the room and down the carpeted stairs, a wild, embittering anger clutching at his throat, the mother, stricken, leaned against the mantelpiece, her eyes agape, her face wan—her senses slowly trying to clear away the obstruction of pain and anger lodged there.

CHAPTER II

DOWNSTAIRS in the hall, Leonard ran to a little table whereon was placed a telephone, concealed in a cabbage-leaf arrangement of yellow and red tissue paper.

In his effort to get at the receiver he quite tore away the flimsy disguise. His voice, however, as he told the number, was strong and his face determined looking, as if in his mind there played the thought that any wrong he may have committed toward his mother was now suddenly balanced by this assault.

A half hour later he was seated in a small red phaeton, alongside a woman some years older than he, with brilliant reddish hair and pale cheeks. He explained as she listened, her gaze fixed admiringly upon his face:

"You know I don't know how it happened, Mrs. Leeds. It certainly wasn't anything I did. But she—just got crazy-like—for a second. Why—" his eyes blazed at the recollection, "for a minute I thought she was trying to kill me. I'm going to get away. I am going to try to do something for myself. I think I see a way of managing things."

He thought a moment, then went on, the while he gazed hard ahead:

"I'm not going to stand it any longer. I can't stand the way she preaches about my future and how companionable we ought to be. Why," he reflected thoughtfully, "it's gotten so now I can't wait till I get out of the house

I believe she's just gone crazy from thinking too much about my future."

"Dear boy," murmured Mrs. Leeds, regarding him affectionately as he rambled on, telling her that some one must have spoken about their being together and whimsically adding, with a half glance at her:

"I suppose they think I'm in love with you, Mrs. Leeds."

She did not comment on his words, only looked straight at him, quizzically even, as if it were painful that he should make fun of something she held sacred and yet not daring to point to this thought of her weakness for fear of his recognising it. Then she would lose him altogether, she saw.

Leonard went on to say that mothers ought to know that a boy had to grow up and be a man some time. "What difference does it make, just because a woman happens to be your mother?" he asked earnestly, in a manner full of conviction. "Maybe it sounds terrible, but I think everybody accepts facts like these too easily. They sort of don't think for themselves." He looked determinedly onto the road for a time, then broke out: "Which is no reason why I can't afford an original idea once in a while. I know mothers are just things of chance, like gambling for instance."

The young woman at his side remained silent. When she did answer him her words had a bit of reprimand in them, only shading off into agreement with him as her eyes turned from the reins he held, onto his handsome face.

"Well," she replied, "you know some mothers don't realise that times are different than when they were young, Lennie. But maybe you ought——" She hesitated, then ended by saying: "Oh, well, I've gone through so much

myself, Lennie, I don't blame you for wanting to go to New York. Sometimes I wish I could get out of this town. But my husband thinks the sun just rises and sets here. And when he comes off the road he wants to rest, you know."

Leonard interrupted, apparently unaware of her words: "Well, I've got my life planned out differently. I certainly don't intend to fool myself the way others do. Maybe it's because I've seen so much unhappiness already at home. But I know one thing. First, I'm going to live in New York, and secondly, I'm going to get on after I get there. I'm going to be hard and mean." He talked more to himself than to the doll-faced woman at his side. "Every time I find myself caring or falling in love I'm just going to—to cut it out. I'm going to be cold—strong. You watch me, Mrs. Leeds."

While she regarded him with affectionate eyes he went on. But as he talked the idea confronted him that it would do very little good to get sympathy from her. "I've got to get along," he told himself. "She can't help me any more than anybody else here."

Even as he looked at her he felt sorry that he had 'phoned her. Somehow her short, little nose seemed stubbier than ever before.

He ran on:

"Anyway, nobody can manage your life for you. When mother called me down so terribly this morning for going out with you—it was only because of her selfishness—because I'm not working out things according to her plans. I suppose she thinks I'm not able to take care of myself. Now, isn't that true?" he asked. "When the true reason is that she fears I'd do something on my own hook and prove she's wrong."

Without giving her a chance to answer, he continued impetuously, though not so much to himself:

"The whole trouble with her is she's suffered all her life because she's too sentimental. And there's never been a minute that she hasn't paid for being that way, somehow or other. And that's not going to be my lot."

"I'm sure of that," his companion broke in, now smiling at him, and looking rather intently at his interesting face and brightly burning eyes. "You'll never care for anybody but yourself, Leonard, will you?"

"Well, love isn't going to mean anything to me," he answered, looking at her as if he had been hurt by her words, "until I've got other things arranged first—things like a home and money." He murmured on with a note of weariness in his voice. "I'm sick of being poor. I think I'll marry some woman—about forty or so. They're more sensible then, anyway."

CHAPTER III

MRS. VERNON waited in her bedroom that evening while Leonard, in his room adjoining, without plan or arrangement for the future, packed a small steamer trunk. Very quietly he emptied the drawers and picked out shirts and underwear, which he placed into the top tray. Occasionally, however, he managed to shut a drawer or replace a tray in the trunk so noisily that his mother, who was listening in the next room, would hear.

And the whole time the mother waited and wondered what he would do. It had been a terrifying day for her. Not a word had passed between them all afternoon. Many times she felt she could no longer restrain herself from rushing into the next room and clasping the foolish, wilful boy in her arms and crying out:

"Lennie, please, please forgive me. I didn't know what I was doing this morning. Do what you want. We will go to New York—yes, anything, only love me—and know how your mother loves you."

With all her heart she longed to do this. What would life be anyway, she thought, if he should actually carry out his threat?

Then she would reason:

But could she really give in? How would it be afterwards? Wasn't there some better way?

In misery, the mother sat and speculated. She had heard her son come in at noon, later heard him go into the kitchen for a bite to eat—and talk to Mattie—and

then come upstairs into the bedroom. She could hear the drawers slamming now. And again the clutch came at her heart. Supposing the boy really did go away?

It was quite nine o'clock when she slipped on her frayed, blue silk dressing gown and went back to the rocker by the window. Her face was pale, her eyes sunken, her soft cheeks marred by the imprint of fingers which nervously she had raised now and then to her face.

Two different ideas at last settled in her mind.

One was that she could no longer control her son, that she must give in to him. The other was that there was no one to help her. There was no one. The mother who had so hoped and prayed—for more than eighteen years—was helpless.

Raising her aching head on her hand again, Mrs. Vernon went over the whole situation, thinking what had so gradually brought it about, going back in her memories to the time when she was Leonard's age, when even at eighteen the thought of being a mother had filled her mind.

Recounting and recapitulating, her thoughts shocked every once in a while by a noise in the next room, she went over the mistakes of the past years, her mind careening along the highway of that almost forgotten time; while her heart, seared by the truant recollections, throbbed open its casket of remembrances and let out into distracting flight all the stored fancies, the smothered passions that so long had lain there desolate.

She caught an impression, strangely well defined, of her marriage to the tall, delicate, almost effeminate looking Francis Vernon; the way she, an unknowing, seventeen-year-old girl, had approached the black clothed form of the minister—the emotion that had welled in her as

she walked erectly along the aisle. She saw herself quite plainly, catching even the fleeting expression on the faces she passed. She could remember how well she looked then, how tall she seemed, and how soft were her hands with their graceful, tapering fingers as she put on the wedding ring. Even the words came back to her ears that the man so many years older than she used to whisper:

"Oh, Marion, love me a little, you beautiful child." That was his favourite expression she remembered—"you beautiful child."

She recalled even more from these forgotten days, glimpsing the picture of one early spring morning . . . that had changed everything. She was sitting in front of her dressing table. Her mother came into the room, her pale, streaked face showing plainly the result of a tearful night.

"Oh, Marion," she sobbed, "please think a little of your poor mother. You know how poverty stricken we are, and Mr. Vernon is so rich. Please think a little of me, dearie."

Her poor, selfish mother. Oh, mothers of the world, if they could only know!

Mrs. Vernon thought on.

After all, was she right in denying her child quite as her mother had denied her? Perhaps she was—as perhaps all mothers were—to blame, were selfish in hoping for a continuance of their youth through their children.

Still, had a mother the right to direct her son's course, even though the boy thought he was old enough to have a mind of his own?

Her answer came emphatically: "Yes. Only a mother

was experienced enough and had lived long enough to know what was best for her child."

Mrs. Vernon arose now and was on the point of calling into the next room when she saw that another quarrel would be the only outcome.

So she sat down again, seeking some more decisive answer, some solution of the situation that would silence Leonard—and still hold him back. A dozen times over she covered the printed designs of the wall-paper, asking herself the question: "What ought a mother, who loves her boy, do in a case like this?"

And in her soul, where mother love puts on the guise of unselfishness and then succumbs to self-blame for the possible deception, all the different arguments assailed each other. Her first ideas guided, then became the cause of remorse until they were conquered again. And, as always, the old submissive spirit in her won the day. There was only one way for peace.

Going to the door, she called into the next room. Her voice was steeled to it, but with a tremor penetrating: "Lennie, Lennie."

Following her words, she walked into the boy's room and stood by his side, while Leonard, looking up from where he was bending over the trunk, surprisedly eyed her.

In a forced, calm way Mrs. Vernon began:

"Leonard, do you think I'm altogether in the wrong? Now, let's talk this thing over, mother to son. Perhaps you will see my point of view too, Leonard."

The boy stood quiet for a moment, apparently in doubt of what course to pursue. At last he said in rigid fashion:

"It's no use, mother, I tell you." He turned and began

to pace the room restlessly. "I can't stand it here. I'm bored to death. I can't go back to school any more. I'm too sick of it."

The colour came high on his cheeks. He took hold of the cord dangling from his dressing robe and intermittently squeezed the tasselled end. After a time he said, looking up: "I am sorry that you take it so hard, mother, but if you stay in this town much longer I'll hate you the way I hate everything else."

His mother looked at him, her heart throbbing with disappointment at her boy's manner. "You must think what you are saying to me, Lennie," she pleaded, while the thought flashed into her mind as she saw his intelligent face cloud and his blue eyes sparkle, that she had read somewhere that this wilfulness was a disease, just like the desire to kill or steal.

However, her appeal brought only a more defiant argument. "It's no use, mother. You don't know how unhappy I've been for a long time. Why, what chance have I got here? I've some ambitions of my own, you know. You might as well know it now. I must live my own life."

Mrs. Vernon gazed unhappily at the temper-ridden boy. But she remained silent, only shrinking a little more from him as he continued impulsively, aroused to a bolder stand. Leaning against the grey marble mantel-piece, he went on vindictively, pointing out the injustice done him by holding him in a small town, away from all opportunity.

"Why," he argued, "you're just selfish, mother. You want me to stay with you because you would be lonely without me. Well, it's not my fault now, is it—that I was born? Then why didn't you marry again when father died?" He moved restlessly toward her. "And have

another child? You see, you've never watched the practical side of things and now you're just afraid of suffering for it."

The mother appeared aghast at the convincing manner he was using and the cold tones of his argument. It seemed as if she were inarticulate from amazement, for, though her lips were silent and her eyes gazed appealingly at him, her thin long fingers were never silent for a moment, moving from the edge of the mantel to her buttons and then to her forehead, again and again.

And Leonard was aware of the agony he was causing her. Following his words much in the manner of a lawyer who watches his jury, he told her how they could go into New York and become happy and successful.

"Why, mother," he said, "you could go into New York and land somebody yourself—if you didn't think you were so old. Then we could have a decent home and I could have a better chance that way." Turning toward the window, he stared out into the street for a time, saying more to himself than to her: "But it's no use, you know. All you want to do is to stay here in Elyria and think about your life being over and getting your youth through me, and rot like that."

Suddenly the thoughts of the morning appeared to have come back to him, for his rebellion was even greater than ever. In words that came to his mother's ears like cold steel, he exclaimed:

"Anyway, I don't believe there is any love lost between us, mother."

Conscious of the unrelenting expression that was settling over his wilful face and as if anxious to stop his train of thought before it went beyond his control, Mrs. Vernon burst out:

"Oh, child, where have you learned all this? You talk more like a woman than a man—my son."

Suddenly she burst into tears. The stress of the day apparently had found its vent. Laughing strangely for a moment, she quite as abruptly went into convulsive sobs. This she kept up for some minutes, while Leonard stood regarding her, only after some time entreating her to calm herself and not carry on so.

Soon, with her handkerchief to her face, Mrs. Vernon turned and ran from the room. The expression on her face told plainly now of the wild thoughts in her mind. Why should she go on living when there was nothing to live for? If she were not here, could not Leonard go on unhampered and amount to something? If she were dead—perhaps it would be far easier, for then she would never know how the child who meant everything to her had suffered from his queer, selfish, emotional nature.

She would kill herself. That would be the only way out.

It was in this fashion Mrs. Vernon reasoned as she flung herself on the bed in her room.

While Leonard stood quietly wondering what to do, it suddenly struck him that something might have happened to her.

Then he, too, ran out into the hall and followed into the next room and saw her, lying outstretched across the white lace spread, sobbing with deep stifled cries that shook her entire body.

As he stood looking down upon her Leonard's tower of determination was shaken, and he bent over her, putting his arms around the quaking body, holding her tight, until it seemed that the hysteria had eased off. He even

found tears rushing to his own eyes, which he fought back resolutely.

And he cried: "Mother, mother, please don't carry on so. Please, please don't. I'm sorry I hurt you. I only want you to understand."

But his mother lay motionless and, except for deep racking sobs that escaped now and then, she seemed unaware that her son was near her.

Only after a time did she impetuously take hold of his face and frame it with her trembling hands. And then, apparently forgetting all the cruel imputations, all the heartless words, remembering nothing nor asking for reasons, but only swayed by a mother's natural instincts, she threw her white arms about the boy's slender body and cried out as she gazed at him:

"Lennie, my son, you don't know what this day has done to me. I've seen your father in you—for the first time. And you—can't know what unhappiness he brought me."

They lay together, cheek against cheek, which seemed to ease her hysteria somewhat, while with trembling fingers she smoothed back his soft brown hair, saying as she stroked it:

"Darling, listen to me. Perhaps your mother is different from most mothers, for every thought and every desire she has had for over eighteen years has been for her little baby."

Leonard replied restlessly: "Yes, I know, mother."

Now Mrs. Vernon ran on to more and more self-scanning, whispering, as she gave his soft hands a passionate squeeze, that she alone was to blame and was only getting what she deserved. As if making herself a little more pathetic might move the child to repent, she started to say that which lay uppermost in her mind—

how years before she had thought many times of running away from her husband, how it had only been the baby that held her back until too late.

However, she controlled herself, and tranquilly enough said, as she looked deep into the boy's eyes: "Yes, my son, I am getting what I deserve. I never cared for your father. I married him for the money he had. I wanted a home. Yes, I'm getting what I deserve."

Leonard watched her closely while she told more in detail of her struggles at that time. And how her mother had suffered.

"Yes," she added, "it was more for my mother than for myself, dear." Now she seemed to forget entirely how prostrated she had been. Getting up from the bed, she went to the bureau and took out of a drawer an old daguerreotype, explaining, after she had come back and showed it to Leonard, that she had saved it for nearly eighteen years. She talked about this picture in a voice full of reminiscent sadness, a voice that ended always in a languorous murmuring protest against things having been that way. Only as she felt more sympathetic understanding from him did her voice lose its weariness and her eyes open.

But Leonard knew that in the end he must not give in and to keep his purpose clear in mind kept repeating this resolve to himself, even as the mother indulged in more and more self-revealing. And as she told of her years of travail, Leonard noticed how tensely drawn her lips had become and how sad were her eyes—the expressive sadness that comes when one recalls the past.

Mrs. Vernon continued:

"So I had my punishment, dear. I could have married another man. He is a judge now and has a fine, happy

family. And I married a man I didn't love—because the man had money. And God made me suffer by giving me affection that I didn't want." She paused, then thought aloud: "Oh, I'm not going to let you make that mistake, Lennie. I see the way clearly now."

She went on to tell him how she had planned for him to marry some noble girl and how she had looked forward to the time when she could kiss his little babies. "Oh, God knows that thought was sweet music to my mind!" she cried. "I hate to give up that hope, Lennie."

As if overtaken by some outburst from a hidden well of truth, now she told Leonard all that had been searing her. Imploringly, half crazed by the anxiety that stifled her at the thought of how her child would be far away from her, she went on, though in her words was the tone of one who knows the futility of her plea.

"I want you to know all this, my son," she said earnestly. "I held back during his whole life, Lennie, just waiting—waiting for you." She searched his face. "Perhaps you see the reason now why I wanted to get some happiness from you."

Some joy came to her at the moment, for she perceived that the expression in the boy's eyes had softened, as if there were tears coming. But her happiness was short-lived, for suddenly Leonard jumped from the bed and began walking back and forth in front of the windows, more restless and defiant than ever.

"I want to have some fun," he nearly shouted. "I want to have my chance to be somebody. Can't you understand?"

Instantly she stopped him. "Leonard, you've got strange ideas about life. I'm afraid you are going to be very unhappy some day." Then she said, as if she had

been hurt: "You ignore me entirely—you seem to forget that I brought you into the world and have a right to want to love you." She murmured on, the old sadness trailing into her thoughts:

"I raised you and watched over you, just to bring you to what you are to-day. I felt that all this was worth waiting for, Lennie. And yet you think that it is only the big city and wealth that will make you happy. And I know—that it's only love that can do it." She thought for a time, then said: "Just so you find it when you're young. All the rest comes after that. And if love means nothing to you, Lennie, I am terribly afraid for you."

Leonard's attention was attracted by the strange breaking tremolo in his mother's words. Fearing another paroxysm of anguish, without much notice of what had brought it on, he took hold of her pale hands and said, softly, as if to match up with her mood:

"Mother, I'm so terribly sorry for you. Indeed I am. You don't know how sorry I am that you have suffered so."

Silence came between them after this, though a strange curiosity came into the mother's eyes and manner, which rather startled Leonard. For some time Mrs. Vernon looked at him and then nodded her head affirmatively, as if finding the truth of thoughts hidden in her mind.

And at last she cried out: "Oh, I'll give in to you! We'll sell everything and move to New York. I'll let you do as you please, but—oh, my poor boy!—God knows what will happen to us."

CHAPTER IV

MOVING into New York was not the simple procedure that Leonard had thought it. Although he troubled very little about it, leaving everything to his mother while he lent himself entirely to the bewildering glamour of riches and busy life that confronted him.

He roamed up and down Fifth Avenue, drinking in the city's veneer like some young adventurer from a desert slaking his thirst. And at night, when he went up to the third floor of the crumpling brownstone house on Fifty-fifth Street where they had their rooms, he shut his eyes to the horror of the reality surrounding him by telling his mother again and again how wonderful it all was.

"Why, everybody is rich here, mother. The poor people don't count, they don't exist."

This statement became a chronic apology for the weary questions she asked of him on his return from his job hunting expeditions. It had come down to a necessary acknowledgment of failure within the first six weeks of their new residence. Judge Talbott, whom the good-looking Leonard had sought out during the first days, turned him off in a manner that only Mrs. Vernon was acquainted with. Calling the mother on the 'phone the next morning after Leonard's visit to him, the Judge said politely, sadly, sympathetically:

"Dear, dear, what can I tell you? Your son is a wonderfully handsome fellow, but I don't dare recommend

him to any position of responsibility. Why, he sat here yesterday in his white and black checked vest and patent-leather shoes hardly conscious of what I was talking about. When I mentioned starting at the bottom he sneered at me. Oh, my poor dear woman!"

Leonard began now to lose his courage, which worried the mother even more, and she did everything in her power to cheer him up and make him understand that it was only because his gifts were so different from others that he found so little appreciation. She gave him more money to spend than they could afford, she made him stop his job hunting altogether so that he might further his studies in art.

These were indeed harassing times. Leonard would rush out of the house the moment a meal was over and, with a few dollars in his pocket, embark on expeditions that she no longer stopped to question. However, time and again she caught the faint odour of liquor on his breath as he came in late and kissed her good-night. The 'phone rang constantly too, and the voices were always either too mature in their tones or else too childlike and petulant.

So the days repeated themselves, end on end, until Mrs. Vernon could stand it no longer. Calling him into her room one night, she said to him as sympathetically as possible:

"Leonard, what are you doing with your time?"

Somehow he appeared ready with his sullen answer.

"Well, mother, I'll tell you. I've stayed in this town long enough to know that it's only the big game that's worth while going after. You can work all your life, see, or you can get people to work for you all your life." He gathered force in his remarks as he went on. "I've

been figuring it out. People are either victims or not, in this world. I'm not going to take a job unless it's got a chance, a real chance, to get me some place."

His mother shrank from his commonplace manner as if he were shooting poison darts at her. As he went on she could only repeat to herself the words that he had never stooped to before—"See"—"Understand."

"I'm going to drive big or not at all, understand. I'd rather starve than have to eat bread and butter all my life."

For the first time the mother became really aware of what ingredients were in her son's make-up. And after that she went on in her heart-broken way, never molesting him or trying to make him view what would be the eventual outcome of his new philosophy.

Until one day, near the end of their twelfth month.

For weeks Mrs. Vernon had gone back to spending her time sitting by the window thinking and reflecting, and now her thoughts were just as disabling to her confidence in the future as they had been in the years before at Elyria. Only the accompaniment was different. Instead of birds in the trees or children running past whom she had known from their infancy, there was now the brutal chugging of automobiles in the row of garages opposite. She sat thinking over the change that had come to her baby boy. She saw him slowly absorb the city's false manner of wealth. One habit after another had taken hold of him. His hair was glistening much darker now with a brilliantine and polished down to a mirror-like surface, his nails were shiny to a pinkish white.

That night she stopped him just as they rose from the dinner table. Leonard had already made his way into the hall for his coat and hat before he really listened

to her call, and he actually showed his resentment when she gently took hold of his arm, as if his thoughts should not be intruded upon. It might have been the tears, suddenly glistening in his mother's eyes and which she fought back with all the control she could muster, that arrested him.

"Leonard," she cried, "why won't you tell me all that you are doing? Why do you leave me here alone night after night? Don't you know how I worry?"

He lifted his drooping head just enough to return her piteous gaze. When finally he did manage to answer her, he groped awkwardly for his words, which more emphatically than ever brought to the mother an understanding of the losing fight.

"Oh, mother," he said, "I am a man. I've got men's things to work out for myself, you know. I'll come out all right if you'll just leave me alone for a while."

He turned toward the door as if this should settle the argument, but Mrs. Vernon ran on quickly to what she wanted to say, the while she spoke in soft pleading words.

"Leonard, why don't you take up your sketching again? You know how clever you are at drawing and how everybody back home thought that would be your career. Why don't you get interested in it and make up your mind to be a success and claim your own—honestly, like other men?" She put her arm through his as if to draw him back into the dining-room. But he stood stolidly in his tracks. "You know, there would be a wonderful chance for you in working on a newspaper, or in an architect's office. I would be so happy, dear, if you would do this. I'd," she turned away to hide tears that were now unmindful of her will—"I'd almost be willing," she added,

"to endure all the loneliness if I knew you were succeeding."

The next morning Mrs. Vernon called up Judge Talbott and explained how anxious Leonard was to get work along a draughtsman's lines. "He would be so good at making water colours of buildings and things like that," she cried over the 'phone. "Please help me, my friend."

In fact, Leonard had no way to walk out of the situation when, on the following day, the Judge called up Mrs. Vernon and said that by accident he had been able to procure just such a position for Leonard in a large art glass works at Hastings, New York.

They concluded their arrangements quickly enough.

"I think I'll go back to Elyria until you can send for me," Mrs. Vernon said to the boy. "You must write often, though, and just devote yourself to making a career. I'm so happy."

His mother seemed to carry out and complete all the details for their departure quite before he could gather his objections.

But though he was going off to a position of his mother's making, he determined to see if he could not get out of the rut that was holding him and really shape his own career when he was once free from home ties.

When the mother stood on the back platform of the train bound for Elyria waving good-bye to him, she was really happy, for he seemed to be in earnest for the first time in his life.

CHAPTER V

TEN days after Leonard Vernon had forsaken his mother in New York and entered into the routine of his new position at the great Jacob Clemons' Art Glass Works, Hastings, U. S. A., he met Jennie Clemons, his employer's daughter.

Jennie was a blonde person, a tall girl, beautiful, though a little too stout, whose ignorance kept her from being a bore to many intelligent men.

The moment she met the handsome Leonard she told him in her hesitating, even babyish, way that she had heard so much about him from her father, how different he was from the other men in Hastings and how artistic and intelligent were his tastes.

And it was only three months after this meeting that Leonard wrote to his mother in Elyria the following letter:

"DEAR MOTHER:

"You ask me to come out to Elyria if I'm not doing well here. Now, I'm doing very well indeed. I believe results will begin showing pretty soon for now I am not designing any more and am getting more into the business end of it with Mr. Clemons.

"It's best that I give up my 'artistic career,' as you put it, for a time. I am really getting some sense about life and don't want you to keep worrying about me. The world does not care about my artistic career. That's the trouble with most people anyway—they think more about the world and what the world might think than they do of themselves. I am

going to think more of myself. At least I believe I've learnt to do that much since I left home.

"I hate to go over the whole thing again, but really, mother, it's best that I left home after all because I don't believe I was driving very straight towards being a real man. When I think back and realise how soft and weak I was about everything—it scares me. I'm reading a lot now and just last week finished a book by Montaigne.

"The people up here are pretty commonplace; but strangely one gets into their mode of life and doesn't feel so much any of the outside contrasts. Which is just as well. I'm wearing Hastings glasses now, over my eyes and mind, and I have about decided to include my heart as well.

"Now I'll write often and tell you all that's happening. Anyway, let's be sensible. You think it over and you'll see that it's only those people in the world who measure out everything that get along well. My health is better too since I cut out the artistic stuff.

"I'm sorry you're so lonesome. Don't you think you ought to go out more? You know everybody out there.

"With love, your son,

"LEONARD."

Then the following Saturday Leonard drove up on the state road to Albany. He seemed determined to get along in this affair with his employer's daughter.

With Jennie by his side they followed the soft dirt road, his own strange quietness influencing even the mind of the young girl.

On one side of them was an unending expanse of waving green fields of corn, dotted here and there by yellowish patches of wheat. On their left was dense shrubbery and high trees. Now and then a rift opening through showed the river below shining in the strong sunlight like a wide ribbon of polished glass.

Leonard was indeed strangely silent, finding satisfaction in watching to see if Jennie would match his mood.

Until at last she exclaimed: "Oh, Mr. Vernon, what do you say—let's stop on the side of the road and go down and watch the river."

He looked at her and smiled back, "Why—I think it would be nice, don't you?"

Then he pointed out a place in the ditch-like hollow along the road and she jumped out, while he backed into the rut and tied the horse to a tree. Even as he laboured with the animal she gazed at him approvingly with wide admiring eyes—eyes that seemed to hide words of flattery, that were forever crying for life at her hesitating lips.

At last the horse was quieted and the buggy settled into a patch of deep weeds and grass and he jumped from the seat and led the way, Indian fashion, through the trees. Holding his hand back of him as he walked, he said: "I guess everything will be safe there, Miss Clemons. Perhaps you had better keep near me."

But the trees were close together in places and so after a few steps, as if to make easier the steep descent, he casually put his arm around her waist.

"We can walk better this way, I think," he remarked. When they had gained a spot that glimpsed the river, they stopped to enjoy the scenery and stillness about them. Leonard felt a vague inertia in the quietness of the trees, and as the tall girl beside him stood gazing silently, also apparently happy, he gave way to a languid spell of dreaming. Casting his eyes down on to the river, he saw a small power boat lazily slipping through the water, leaving after it a flood of bubbles, like a train of surging jewels.

But Jennie broke in on his silence.

"I think there is a good place to sit down farther along," while the thought disturbed her queerly that he was more silent than any man she had ever known.

"I love it when it is so quiet like this," he answered.

Walking on, they at last reached a stony ledge that hung directly out over the river. Here they stood for some time, both occupied in watching another boat which, like some white bug, was crawling off from the shining surface into two projecting arms of timber on the shore opposite.

It moved Leonard to remark that it looked like some animal entering its trap.

"All the people are waiting to see what is caught," he added.

"It surely is delightful here," she breathed deeply.

Then Leonard looked down at the ground and said quickly:

"Let's rest here. You're out of breath, aren't you?"

"Oh, not so very."

Though when she sat down and threw her sweater on the ground and lay back, there came a contented sigh. Her skirt folded itself tightly about her limbs, and with her arms thrown back all the developing maturity of her form became apparent.

Leonard looked down on her.

"It certainly did take your breath," he said.

She did not answer him at the moment, only glanced down into the river, though presently she exclaimed, pointing as she spoke:

"Oh, look how beautifully the mist is hanging over the water!"

The river, caparisoned by a rainbow of colours made

by the sun as it shot down through the mist, was rippling along in a slowly moving current. And off to their right, crowning a hill, their eyes were caught by the tops of a cluster of tall, haunting maples, swaying desolately in a gentle breeze.

"Don't you just love this?" she murmured.

"I surely do."

With her hands she began shutting out all else but the dazzling blue vault of the heavens, after the manner of a landscape artist hunting for his framed bit of perfection.

"Did you ever try this?" she suggested.

To do as she bid, he too lay down on the smooth rocky surface beside her and rimmed his eyes with his hands. However, he soon gave up this task and seemed content to gaze moodily about him.

For a long time, then, they were silent, both dreamily staring up at the sky.

Until at last a sigh escaped from her.

"Gee, this is great. I just love it," she murmured.

When there came no answer, she said:

"Don't you think so?"

"Of course I do," he answered lazily.

Now she saw that his gaze was again lost in the river below them.

"That's the way everybody goes on—just like the river down there—on and on and never able to change the place they're going to." His words were moody, tinged by dull melancholy.

Sensing the trend of his thoughts and wishing that at this moment he would not spoil the pleasing quietness about them, she replied airily:

"Oh, let's not think things like that now, Mr. Vernon.

Let's just be happy." She turned away from him and exclaimed in a vague way: "Let's just imagine we're lost so that nobody would ever find us—just away from the world."

Leonard looked at her, aroused.

"Why, that's just what I don't want to do. That's just what I'm never going to do. I'm going to stay in the world."

His blue eyes flashed as he spoke, and as he smiled a little she appeared to feel that he thought she was not taking him seriously. So she encouraged him to go on by an almost reverent gaze on him. He said, after some time, while he tore holes in the sandy soil with a jagged piece of stone: "Do you know, Miss Clemons, my mother never thought I was going to amount to anything? She just wanted me to be weak—be an artist and have ideals. She was always watching me. Why, before I came up here to work for your father, when I'd go up to the top floor to sketch and paint I always knew she'd be up there in about five minutes. Why, until I left home I never had a chance to think for myself."

As he talked the girl was pleased immeasurably by his confidence, though somehow, in an unexplainable way, a wonder was growing in her heart whether he was laughing at her for taking him seriously.

"You know," he went on, "sometimes I wish I could get away from everybody—just be the only person in the world." He clenched his hands tightly as he worded the thought. "It's pretty hard to meet any one who really understands."

Bashfully, she objected: "Don't you think I understand?"

Smiling back at her, he said slowly, as he studied her: "Perhaps—you do."

Now Leonard lay back silently, and Jennie, very close to his side, methodically busied herself in finishing up one of the holes he had been digging. Then she too stopped and became lost in a day dream; while Leonard was vaguely thinking how he should make his next move, his mind planning stratagems at the command of an impulse, of the existence of which he was hardly aware.

At last he rolled over on his side and began replacing the yellow sweater under her loosened hair. But he was unable to accomplish this while leaning on his elbow and so took away the sweater altogether and instead placed his arm under her shoulders.

"Isn't that better?" he asked, while the thought shot through him that her lips were actually inviting him.

Though she failed to answer, after some time he relaxed his gaze on her and lay back quietly with his eyes dreamy, apparently content that she had offered no protest to this casual caress.

For some minutes then there was this quality of silence between them. Only the sharp crowing of a hawk circling high above them disturbed the silence.

Suddenly Leonard jumped to his feet and began to walk back and forth with long, decisive strides. His deepened breathing told her that some troubling force had beset him.

"What's the matter, dear?" she said uncertainly.

A nearly unendurable period passed before he sat down rigidly by her side.

She looked at him earnestly. "You do like me—a little?" she questioned.

He studied her quizzically, in an unaroused fashion. Until she repeated:

"Don't you?"

A shudder passed over him, a paroxysm that made him sigh and drew his shoulders together. When he looked up she saw that an expression had settled on his face which was strangely changed from his usual gentleness.

At a loss for words to break his strange attitude, she muttered:

"Didn't you hear me?"

"You said something about my liking you, I think?"

He still gazed at her whimsically, soon startling her by bursting into a clear, unnatural laugh.

With just a little anger she exclaimed: "Why, what's the matter?"

And now he got up again and began to walk back and forth. It was some minutes before he turned to her and said, quite seriously:

"I wonder if you would understand?"

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked.

Now he seemed determined to point out his views and be understood by her.

"Well, maybe you don't understand. But things like kissing seem so unimportant. You know, I've thought a lot about it, too. Just because a man likes to kiss a girl and she likes to have him do it—is no sign that a man ought to be in love with her. Now, is it?" He added: "Then a man's job on earth is too important for him to let sentimental things like that—rule him."

"Do you mean," she cried, trying to penetrate his thoughts, "that a man and a girl ought to go on making love to each other—just for the fun of it? Why, how queerly you talk."

He came back at her directly, saying: "Of course—why not?"

She thought about it seriously for some time while two red spots mounted high on her already coloured cheeks. At last she said:

"Well, no man that is a man will go on making love to a girl or want to make love to a girl—unless he's—in love with her. Everybody knows that." She bit her lips until they showed a fine red line. "And if he is in love with her, why then he'd want to marry her. And if she loves him enough to want him to kiss her"—she looked deeply into his eyes—"then she'd want to marry him."

She waited for some time for his answer, busying herself the while, to better show her control and lessening concern, by dusting her face and throat with a chamois drawn from a pocket in her sweater.

But Leonard appeared amused now that she had become so serious, though from the way he looked ahead of him, and now and again took a deep breath, she could tell that some thought was troubling him. At last he said slowly:

"I knew you'd talk like that."

Then he went on: "Well, I'll not change my views, anyway. I like to kiss, and I guess you do, too. That's the way we're built. I can't see the use of lying to ourselves. I think if it were wrong for us to be like that, then we should have been made different from the start. At least, when it comes to marrying somebody, why then it certainly is different. That's one thing I'm not going to fool myself about."

While she listened he continued slowly, wonderingly, wording his thoughts as if they were the result of great deliberation.

"It's just this: I've made up my mind to be a success, some time. Maybe I've thought more about it than most men of my age. Maybe it's that I've learned a good deal just watching. Anyway, I'm not going to fool myself the way everybody else does." He paused for a moment. "You know, I don't think that an artist can have love affairs and feel deeply about them, like other people. They don't get over them so quick—and they're hurt more, because they feel more. Then they've got another business than just getting married, like other people, and they've got to guard their business so that their power of—expression won't suffer." He looked up at her. "Do you see what I mean? It's just that getting married has nothing in the world to do with kissing or making love. They don't belong to the same family." He added: "Anyway, it might be all right for ordinary men, but not for artists like myself."

"You mean," she interrupted, her face paling with growing anger, "you mean that you think it's all right to be—to make love with somebody—without really loving them at all?"

He looked at her composedly.

"Why, of course, if it's somebody you like having do it."

Suddenly she got up and ignoring her crumpled linen skirt, reached down and took her sweater and walked quickly away. As she went she threw over her shoulder:

"If you want, you can take me home."

This was unexpected, but somehow it seemed far better to have her angered, which showed how she cared for him, than to give her any understanding that he had been playing or was sorry. "It's only because I'm that way with her that she cares," he told himself.

So he meekly followed her up the hill and through the trees and they were home in less than an hour.

When they gained the iron fence of the Clemons place, Jennie jumped out without a word to him, just holding herself rigid as she opened the gate and walked up the walk to the porch.

Leonard did not get out after her, but drove up the street toward his boarding place, queerly pleased. A wild exultation beat in his heart. As he walked up the green carpeted steps to his rooms, his mind throbbed with the undertsanding that now he had made a final settlement with himself. He would marry Jennie Clemons, the daughter of his employer. She was rich, in love with him and would follow his slightest nod. He could control her to the slightest degree. It would be the keystone of his career.

When he entered his room Leonard took off his hat and coat hurriedly and threw them on the bed, then ran upstairs to the attic space he had rented and fitted up as a work shop. Also, as was his systematic practice, he put on a very faded velvet jacket that he used, took off his low oxford shoes and put on a pair of half slippers. Then, as if he had completed some preliminary task, he began to pace the floor. One thought after another raced through his mind. Now he could have some chance in life. No more sentiment. He would marry this rich girl, much richer than he ever would have been—out of painting—a girl who was just satisfied to have an intelligent, handsome artist for her husband. He was tired of being poor, anyway. He would have a great, big home and a lot of servants and all over the place would be hung Monets, Renoirs, Greuzes, Manets, like at the Fowler Gallery up on Fifth Avenue. And his favourite of

all—Zier's "La Sieste," hand-tinted, so that it would be elegant enough to hang with the rest. Yes, and his own work, too. For then he would paint at his leisure; he would invent a new school perhaps, a combination of Renoir's mystic impressionism with the bolder stroking of Cezanne. But he thought, too—this last idea might be qualified a little. Perhaps it would be better to let the others paint for him. At least a different future than would happen if he waited until his art brought results.

His meditations punctuated now and then by deep inhalations from his cigarette, Leonard pondered over what had kept him so blind all the past years. Settling himself in a large rocker in front of the slanting oval mirror that he used as a reflector, he contentedly regarded himself, while in his mind paraded all the possibilities of a well-managed future. If only he kept control of himself as he had—for instance—this afternoon. Visions came to him of how he would alight from his luxurious motor car, in front of the great hotels in New York; how at night he would step out in his tight-fitting evening clothes in front of the lighted doorways of the theatres. He could almost see his rich wife in a few years. She would look a little older than he did, and perhaps her stoutness would grow, too. But she would look up at him with admiring eyes, and he would know all the time how fascinating she thought him and how, rather than lose him, she would give in to every one of his desires and whims. Yes, this was the only way an artist should live! After that could come the love affairs.

For more than an hour Leonard Vernon sat thinking in this fashion, at last crying out as he studied his mirrored reflection:

"Yes, you bet I'm going to get along. I'm going to

be rich and successful." It was as if some antagonist were viewing him. "Wait, you'll see—you will."

He thought on, his lips compressed, his hands clenched, how much better things had proved themselves now simply because he had decided to be practical. Though, too, if he were to get out into the world of men, he must equip himself well, read up on French history and the fall of the different nations. Then he must read the Russian writers people were talking about.

Leonard remembered that before he had left Elyria he had been rather delicate, a fact which had worried his mother so terribly. But now he was the possessor of a fairly well-proportioned frame, considering his six feet of height. At least, his former frailty had only been an expression of weakness which had come because of his lack of aggressiveness toward life and people. Indeed, he had changed, he saw.

He really had always pitied himself too much. And tried to emphasise this weakness in the presence of others. People seemed to feel so sorry and then would give in so easily. But that was the way women were and the reason for their continual success. When they wanted anything, they acted frail and every one was anxious to give in to them.

No more of all that. He would win now because he was strong. The other could never work out in the long run, anyway. He would use the weak ones, trample over their bending bodies—up the ladder to success.

Leonard's inner being churned itself into a state of tempest. As he sat rocking back and forth, a powerful and tumultuous yearning for great things welled up in him. A demand for conquering harmonies filtered through his young mind's turmoil. He was going to win.

He would climb his porphyry-runged Jacob's ladder to the heights.

At the moment, it would have taken the tremendous cacaphonies of "Tristan" to symphonise with the overpowering rhythm of his youthful fancies. All the inglorious journeys of a score or more of world-famous artists flashed across his clamouring mind. A life of adventure—that was it. And no bowing of his head to pick his way along some unhallowed labyrinth of the commonplace.

Had he not read the story of Chopin, of Napoleon, with envy? They had lived. At fifteen, with aching heart, he remembered how he had read Emma Bovary's miserable tale. Yes, even then, the seed of a strength was in him. Had he not ended up with a feeling that Emma was a fool to be so sentimental, and that the man could not be blamed?

So it was that an invisible audience applauded Leonard Vernon as the torrent of rebellion flooded his soul. He would get on, with envy as the only accompaniment. Others could reverence, if they would, men who martyred themselves for love.

Sitting in front of the oval mirror, Leonard's mind then filled with more quieting and satisfying pictures; a composite of all he had ever read or dreamed, strangely interwoven, like the scenes on the library tapestry downstairs at the Clemons'. Suddenly he was taking a winged flight to the exotic colouring of harems, where soft-armed Bayaderers were caressing handsome Sultans with love-drugged senses; to marble mansions where swarthy Greeks, with their fine handsome bodies, were lost in Bacchanalian adventures. Without detail or structure, his fancies ran into even more idyllic staging—mountain scenes, and shady lovers' lanes, dark cypress glens, where

whispered harmonies came from swishing waterfalls and nickering goats . . . a vague, mysterious fantasm—to which he unresistingly lent himself . . . a conglomerate essence of that unaccountable quality in nature which consorts with the fancies of an untrammelled youth contemplating a serious human relationship for the first time in his life.

He became more aware of his physical self.

Turning his head until he saw the enticing oval of his face in its frame of soft, dark brown hair, he surveyed himself coldly, much as if he were taking an inventory of his assets for the future. He set his jaw and half closed his eyes until they became dreamy, interesting . . . after the manner in which a woman with the portrait of her lover in her heart admires herself before retiring.

And all the time a picture limned itself at the back of his mind. It was that of Jennie waiting for him to come back to her. He could hardly keep from smiling as he thought about it. How interesting it would be to keep her waiting until she was so eager for him, and so afraid of losing him, that she would even help to make his conquest sweeter.

Also he told himself that anxious waiting on her part would make the future between them all the more substantial.

. . . While Jennie was in a different state of mind, indeed. Waiting until Leonard had disappeared, she came down from the porch and walked through the iron gate out into the street again. The hot sun beat down and wearied her and she walked slowly, her hat in her hand, her feet dragging. She was sick at heart, unhappy and angered, as one is who has been slapped in

the face in the dark by some unknown adversary, or suddenly been disappointed after some long and heart-breaking wait. She had been hurt somewhere inside and had a distressing feeling that the wound would never heal as long as she lived.

She was a block or more down the street, on the point of returning home, when she hesitated, thinking what she would tell her father, who, red-faced and nervous from the heat, would be awaiting her for luncheon. Of course, she thought, she might pretend that nothing had happened. But something *had* happened.

The man—she loved——

The thought was more than she could bear. She could not confront him with the calamity that had befallen her still fresh in her mind.

So she turned and walked up the street again, feeling a bit better with the knowledge that her father would not search her face and question her.

Losing all sense of direction, she walked until she was opposite some factories on a street that led directly down to the Hudson. Some truckmen were unloading heavy barrels of flour, and farther on three men were lifting the gang-plank of a boat.

She thought to herself:

"If it weren't for my father, I'd get on some boat and disappear—forever. It would be a good lesson for him. Perhaps he'd never again play with a woman and make her suffer so." That night Jennie sat by the window in her room until the sun crept up red and mocking in the east. Then she threw herself, aching in soul and body, on to the bed and buried her face in the pillows.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day Leonard happened to pass Jacob Clemons' office and heard the president's physician say to the heavy red-faced man:

"It's as I tell you. You will have these dizzy spells, and maybe worse, if you don't take better care of yourself. Your arteries are hardened."

Leonard carried these words with him throughout the day. Somehow they had a significance that he must get at and interpret in a way that applied to his own future.

Sitting in front of his pine board, he kept repeating over and over the physician's words. And he thought on, much further: supposing Jacob Clemons died and the rich Jennie suddenly got to thinking beyond the boundary of Hastings; supposing he married Jennie Clemons and then Jacob Clemons died——

At five o'clock in the evening he could hardly wait until he should see Jennie and make things right. A dozen times he had to hold back from writing a note of confession to her in which he told her how sorry he was that they had quarrelled. On the way home he invested twelve dollars on some American Beauty roses and when he had gained the front entrance of the Clemons' residence his heart was throbbing and creeping up in his throat in a manner that almost choked him.

But Jennie met him at the front door, and her first words brought surcease to his tortured imagination.

"I'm so glad you came, I don't know what to do,"

she cried, taking his hand. "I saw you from the window."

They went into the front room and for some time stood together looking out of the broad bay window onto the sloping lawn. They stood in silence, too, like lovers breathing in unison, though it was a hard fight on Leonard's part to keep from saying something to her that would show repentance for his actions. He held himself back, however, telling himself that everything was in his hands again.

The only compromising thought he worded was that she did so much for him and gave him renewed desires in the battle of life. "It's a fine thing," he said, "to know that you've got—a good friend."

She echoed his "friend" anxiously enough and looked searchingly into his eyes.

Leonard saw that conquest was indeed a simple procedure.

Some ten days later they left about twilight and went up the State Road along the Hudson.

The idea seemed to strike Leonard casually as they were passing a little Chapel House.

That evening when they returned home to Hastings, Jennie was the secret wife of one Leonard Vernon.

Some three weeks later the sclerosis of the arteries gained the upper hand and Jacob Clemons passed away in his fifty-fourth year.

Jennie was a lucky holding, too. She was good to him, gave him the house of her father to live in and a future at the great works quite beyond any flight of imagination he had ever indulged in. But after a few months, when early married life had lost some of its stimulus, he was conscious of her defects more and more. She mouthed a lot of flattering verbiage which drugged

his intelligence; she petted and fed him well, and soon he became undiscerning and much less introspective.

She had big knuckles, also, that kept her from spelling with any style when she accepted invitations from the "nice" people in Hastings, and the Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow set, and her servants talked a great deal of her ability to spend long hours in front of the mirror; she played tennis fairly well, which for a time served to keep away the fat creeping around her chin; and once in a while she would even become interested in some popular and tawdry love story—or become immersed in memorising on the piano, which she played surprisingly well for the sort of music she selected, some popular tune with a syncopated rhythm. Mostly she just waited for Leonard to come home so she could greet him at the front door with some such words as:

"Oo bootiful boy—oo's so tired!"

To offset this, Leonard raised a firm-looking moustache for a few weeks and culled one verse from Milton's "Paradise Lost" and pasted it on a bit of cardboard which he kept continuously on his desk in the mahogany study he had set off the dining-room.

The verse read:

> "High on the throne of royal state, which far
> Outshone the wealth of Omus and of Ind,
> Or when the gorgeous East with richest hand
> Showers on the King barbaric pearl and gold,
> Satan exalted sat."

The last line, a motto that signified power of the merciless calibre, he found to be a sterile prompter of his emotions.

Nearly every morning, after leaving Jennie at the breakfast table, he walked into his study, gazed at the heroic verse and concentrated on its stiffening effect for the rest of the day.

All in all, Leonard soon felt himself a success.

He practically was owner of the Clemons' Art Glass Works, a thing which he saw had only sprouted because of the seeds he had planted in his nature.

He went on contentedly for many months, confident with the absolute control he had over himself.

. . . . . .

Only once in a while, mostly at about twilight, when the shadows would streak into his office, did Leonard sit up aghast at the thought that he was becoming a business man—that, with blunted sensibilities, he was making money and accepting nourishment at the common larder with all the successful Smiths and Joneses of the business world.

This realisation always stifled him, especially when he remembered how a few years before he had decided to be one of the select and never to become tarnished by the commonplace.

So the days passed for him, his convictions perpetually torn asunder by continual evidences of success on one side and on the other by perplexing shifts in his nature which puzzled him, and by inner conscious adventures which were ruthless in their regard for his peace of mind. And he was attacked in this way, mostly any place; in a business meeting; while he dictated important letters to his secretary; or as he sat at the dinner table, talking to his wife or the guests who might be with her.

Then, as usual, in the morning it would be different.

Jennie would greet him, soft and lovely, dressed in

some filmy, clinging material; the grapefruit would be mellow and luscious, the cream thick, the toast just crisp enough;—and her kiss, under the porte cochere, became a perfumed narcotic for the rest of the day.

Noticing how his face cleared, Jennie cultivated a habit now of getting on his lap when he came home sullen and tired. Hugging and petting him, she whispered how wonderful he was, how proud she was of her man. Nor was it a dishonest trick. She really was anxious to be of use to him, getting real pleasure by putting a little more powder on his face as he finished shaving, or in helping him with his collar buttons and studs or changing his tie or waistcoat when he dressed for the evening.

She had the maternal feeling for him, a desire that made her ever want to be his servitor, though Leonard began to feel more and more gradually that her capacity for this rôle was as flaccid as her fattening muscles.

So matters stood when, two years after their marirage, a very beautiful little daughter came to them, whom Jennie persisted in naming Maxine.

This christening was the subject-matter of their first real argument. Jennie seemed to have conceived some tremendous ideal in the baby's name. As Vernon studied his wife during this soon patched-up difference, the thought came to him that the name "Maxine" must be symbolical of some hidden spirit of adventure in her heart. Her eyes lit up and she became quite gay when he gave in to her.

Soon after that she confided in him in her pouting, baby manner that they must some day go to Paris and have a real spree, visiting the restaurants and dance halls, the way they used to do before they were married.

And he understood better the subtlety of it.

CHAPTER VII

AT this time there worked at Leonard's factory a teamster, John Neil.

Neil's wage on account of an inclination for liquor, which made his reputation an unstable one with the different foremen, was sixty-five dollars a month. At least, it was not large enough, and had not been for some years, to keep his sixteen-year-old daughter Marcy in one of Hastings' grade schools much beyond her twelfth year. So she had left school while her skirts were still at her knees, Neil deciding that his motherless home needed her more than she needed further educating.

But it did not make so much difference to the child, who was now a pretty girl indeed, with deep red brown hair and enticing body, just a shade over-developed for one of her years.

However, what she lacked in book-learning, she made up for in dreaming. Marcy, in fact, was a dream-woven child of nature. She matched up in her movements, too, with this dream constructed life of hers. Perhaps she could not have stood her father's treatment of her were she actively engaged in living in the world inhabited by her neighbours on the densely crowded Third Street.

She was away and above all of them.

While her hands were washing some urchin's scratched-up face, her mind was careening along a romance-paved highway; while her little feet were stopping in at Mrs. Quinn's next door, or Mrs. Pavey's around the corner, her

heart was throbbing with vague adventures along some air-castled road.

Marcy had no great names for these mirage-like visions that fluttered and flocked endlessly through her mind. Instead, she just accepted it all in a sort of an ecstatic numbness, the door of her mind held constantly open for it with an eager invitation for more.

So she wandered in and out of her days with this skein of emotional fantasy woven around her, singing a little song in a queer, thin pathetically squeaky voice, a song sung so often by her that it had become a part of her, just as her arm was a part of her. It was the symbol of all her hopes and prayers for the future—a fetish that would charm away all her troubles.

"I'd rather have him and his fifteen a week
Than be some old millionaire's doll,
He's the best thing what wuz, and I love him becuz
He's my pal, he's my pal."

When she was with Lester Moore, the nineteen-year-old fellow she "went with," and he told her he thought he would marry her, she only argued that all the girls married at her age and that she had very little to say about the matter. In fact, every one told her she was lucky to have a fellow like Lester, who was one of the best young lead workers in Vernon's factory.

True, there was within her at times a feeling that she must throw her arms about the boy's neck and make him love her, more as an accompaniment to yearning for affection, than any particular desire to have the stolid Lester.

She really did not care for the lumbering youth who paid so little attention to her. Mostly she walked and

talked with him, conscious at all times of an unusual weariness, lifted only when he left her.

In fact, she was like a ship buffeted by the elements; on the one side by the harsh, bloodless words of her toil-driven father, on the other by the soft meaningless words of the man who would marry her.

At times, as she wailed out her thin, cracked little song, there sprung into the back of her mind the outlines of some tall, Apollo-like lover who said beautiful words to her and caressed her with wonderful gentleness. And relief only came by imagining Lester Moore to be this vaguely outlined wonderful lover. She could tolerate him more easily that way.

But often her only real comfort came from running out into the outskirts of Hastings and jumping over the fences until she gained a certain high mound in the rear of the Vernon grounds and from this height, which was to her like the top of the world, yelling so that all the denizens over and under the earth might hear: "Hi-yi! hi-yi!" She would perch herself strainedly and scream until the echoes answered her from the parched crimson palisades across the river.

And then she would run back, her soul temporarily purged of its pent-up yearnings, her feelings fused into a common chord with the soft air and gently waving trees. It was almost as if she had held communion with the forces that understood her and awaited her coming.

It was sad, indeed, that all this should be spoiled in the evenings when Lester called after his day's work. Everything then seemed to be changed into a sort of duty which she must meet by smiling silently and concealing any word that might give a clue to her true feelings. When the boy roughly caught and kissed her just once,

then stalked away, strangely, as he often did, she felt like calling after him and saying: "Why do you kiss me? I don't want to kiss you." She would always pout when she did this and hold her chin up and shake her head at his imaginary presence.

One evening she walked into the country and back with him. She was looking pretty, indeed, wearing a dark green dress, softened by numerous washings, which showed off the gentle rounding of her hips and the lines of her bosom, in a tantalising way. As they came up the cinder-walk in front of her home he said: "Say, Marcy, you know I'm making two dollars and eighty cents a day now. That's more than your father's getting." But she did not look up so proudly as he imagined she would. Instead he grabbed her arms, saying: "You're the funniest kid I know, Marcy. What's the matter with you? Don't you want to marry me?"

She bowed her head in silence, saying: "Please don't talk like that."

They loitered at the steps of the porch for a long time. Somehow, the boy seemed a little closer to her than ever before. But she concealed from him her spirit of surrender and at the door he stopped her and said:

"Now this is the last time, Marcy. You've just got to say 'Yes' right out, and not keep so quiet about it when I ask you. You know you'll never get another chance like this—even if you are so"—he surveyed her appraisingly—"so darn pretty." Then he took hold of her rather fiercely, saying with his breath a little hotter to her cheeks: "What do you say? Will you tell him?"

"All right," she said; "let's go in."

They found her father in the dining-room. He was sitting at the table, his pipe in his mouth. His seamy

face, wrinkled like the reefed canvas of a sail, was dull and hard set. He looked like one of those beggars whose sharp, deep wrinkles compelled Callot to use for his etchings the hard varnish of cabinet makers.

Lester spoke up proudly as soon as he entered:

"The girl's given in. Ask her yourself."

Neil's face lit up as he muttered: "Well, I supposed I'd have to lose her some time. But she's a good housekeeper, boy. It'll be hard to get along without her."

"I guess we'll get married in a couple of days," said the boy, glancing around the room. He then looked at Marcy and drawled: "I suppose the sooner the better, eh, Marcy?"

With a look of understanding at Marcy, he sat down beside Neil, lighting his pipe methodically, and drawing at it a few times, rhythmically accompanying the old man. "I hear Vernon is going to get rid of a lot of men at the factory," he went on. Marcy saw him watch the effect of his words on her father. "Did you hear anything about it?"

Neil leaned over. "No," he snarled, and added: "Well, I won't be one of 'em."

Moore laughed and then took a few deep puffs at his pipe. "Why—I believe you was to be. I'm not sure. Anyway, you'll be rid of Marcy, and won't have to look after her any more."

And now Neil stood up, his face white through the week-old beard.

"You heard them say I was going?" he repeated. "By God——"

Lester broke in. "Oh, I was just telling Marcy about it. I was trying to make her see that if you lost your job it was another reason why she should marry me."

Neil stood still for a moment, pale and mad-eyed, clutching convulsively at Moore's shoulder. But the boy laughed and gently pushed him off. Then picking up his cap from the table, with his eyes on Marcy, he said:

"Good-bye, Marcy; I'll stop in before work in the morning."

At the door he turned and said to Neil:

"Now don't take this thing so hard. You know I don't care for the boss any more than you do. I know all his sneaky ways as well as you do. So what's the use of getting excited about it?"

He banged the door after him. He was glad to get away.

. . . . . .

Marcy ran upstairs after Lester had left, and had no sooner reached her rafter-roofed bedroom than she threw herself on the bed. It had been a strain for her. She even pulled a cover over her eyes and face to shut out, for a moment, all thoughts of this business-like disposition of her.

And as she lay there she thought:

"I'm going to get away from here—I'm going to get away from here." Somehow she did not dare to word the thought, "I'm going to get married."

Outstretched on the bed, Marcy wondered about the many things that were going to happen to her, wondered if she were pretty as Lester had said, wondered if she would ever love him, or if she would meet the handsome man of her dreams only after Lester and she were married.

But it was hard to understand all this right now. So she merely smiled, sat up on the bed, looked across into the broken mirror on the bureau opposite, the wooden

frame of which was bordered by hair-nets, bits of ribbon and two Kodak pictures badly framed, and said, "Oh, well; oh, well," then smiled gently to herself as she lay back and shut her eyes that she might dream some more.

On his way to work the next morning, Lester stopped at the gate. Through the blinds Marcy saw him and ran out to him with a manner so glad that he was surprised.

"Hello, Marcy!" he said, while his eyes studied her blue-ginghamed figure. "Let's take a walk; can you?" A thought was in his mind that near the factory grounds was a place where he might steal a kiss.

Together they walked in silence for a few blocks of cottage-lined streets, then along a high board fence marked with various painted advertisements. Here he took her hand.

"Well, Marcy, what'll you say if we go up to Squire Conley's office to-morrow?"

"All right, Lester," she answered.

And then the boy put his arms about her and held her tight for an interminable time and kissed her.

He held her so long that it seemed she must tear loose to get her breath, but she even held out against this escape, telling herself that she must give in to him; that the voluntary right for rebellion was no longer hers. Her only solace was that he could not know her dreams about the future.

They were back at the gate before she worded the thought that was troubling her.

"Lester, does everybody get married like this? Don't they love a long time first? And then have an engagement and everything, after the man asks her?"

He laughed and drew her up to him.

"You're my girl," he said. "We'll get married—to-morrow."

And not until Marcy was in her room at night again, and quiet for some time, did she think about her coming marriage or picture what had gone on. Walking about, looking at herself a great deal in the milky mirror, frightened, pleased, even making grotesque faces at herself, she kept whispering:

"I'm going to be married to-morrow!"

Her cheeks felt hot, as if they were burning up. She wanted to cry and laugh at once. So many thoughts scurried through her she could not fix one of them. All of which ended with her leaning against the foot of the bed, sobbing for no reason that she understood.

That night Marcy began preparing for her marriage. Hustling from one drawer to another, from the bureau to an old battered trunk that had belonged to her dead mother, she gathered together bits of ribbon, a little cap she had worn when a baby, a letter she had once written to a youth she met at a picnic and then bashfully never sent, a piece of hair-net in which she had invested one day when an overwhelming desire had encompassed her to be a fine lady. And as she gathered together her possessions she hummed her little song.

The next day, with her father and a friend of Lester's, she walked to Squire Conley's office, and in front of the much initialled wooden railing was married to a man who had asked her to marry him.

CHAPTER VIII

LEONARD VERNON easily and quite unconsciously tolerated the monotonous routine of his married life. His desire for something else—some new field to till—something to put more of an edge on his desires—became so inextricably mingled with his wish for a machine that perpetually flattered him that months piled on months before he was confronted by a personal self-accounting, or by moments that held him rigid with fears about his future. And then the old heart-rending doubts would battle their way into his mind just as they had done when he was in his teens.

What was the use of making money, he would think, as he made out the deposit slips for check after check, if money meant nothing toward attaining one's ideal life, and only reduced you to the commonplace? What was the use of working before the ideal was obtained, since only what came after could bring any happiness?

Often he repeated to himself:

"Yes, God help me, I'm going to get what I want."

He said "God" a good deal and without thought.

At these times he had a vague feeling that "God" was the only one who understood him—and so agreed with him. Also, it was a solacing thing to know that The Omnipotent Being up above was in communion with him at all times and in sympathy with his ambitions.

During the day all this would work itself out somehow, and in his favour, too. He could easily imagine him-

self very successful because of the justice of it. But at night it was not so easy. Alone in his room, when he could see himself in a truer light and was away from Jennie, who acknowledged him so readily as her superior, he would become stiff with doubt and fear. These moments always ended up by his becoming even more defiant, reasoning that the daughter of Jacob Clemons was rightfully being used as one of his stepping stones.

But this mood of self-analysing would attack him again and again, until the question gradually crept into his consciousness as to what really was the thing he most wanted. He hardly dared to acknowledge to himself that the only strong desire he possibly could make out of his yearnings, even in the faintest way, was that it had to do with some woman who would understand him and sympathise with him in his struggle with life. He thought that merely the physical could never fully satisfy his artist's soul.

Until came Mabel Gillette, a stenographer, sent up by an agency in New York; a rather weary person of twenty-eight with hay-like hair and dim, watery eyes.

Only a couple of weeks after her arrival, sympathetically observing Leonard's restlessness, she said:

"You know, you are wasting your time, Mr. Vernon. There are so many big things in the world that we should think about. So many things that lift us above the commonplace, that should give us the right inspiration for living. Oh, Mr. Vernon, when I see you sitting here at your desk and looking so tired over all these meaningless figures, I can't help feeling it is my duty to urge you to fight harder for the things that a man of your intelligence deserves."

That night Leonard said to his wife, when she hung

over the back of his chair as they sat in the stuccoed dining-room now stained to resemble mahogany:

"Good God, Jen, leave me alone! Don't you suppose I ever get sick of you always whining around me; and wanting to do something for me? Let me help myself once in a while. I'm getting too damned content—like an old man. And here I'm young yet. Just let me do something for myself once in a while."

The following day Miss Gillette was urged to tell him more.

"Well, it's that you are living in a futile way, Mr. Vernon," she answered. "I've had to work it out for myself, too. You are being engrossed in petty, material things, the physical in life—that so easily is used up and gives you no return whatever. You are too well satisfied, I guess. How old are you?"

She went on for more than an hour, at the end of which Leonard Vernon sat rigid and unhappy in his big desk chair. Suddenly, and in the old way, he was now filled with recollections. As he listened to the woman it really seemed that she was diagnosing his case even better than she knew. He saw now that, quite unknowingly, for which he could not blame himself, he had slipped into a period of buttery complacence—for all his efforts at telling himself that his material search was only a temporary affair.

Suddenly he wondered if it were too late.

On his way home from the factory that night Leonard's perplexity was not diminished, either. With lips pursed together, then thinning out into two tense sheaves of determination, he sat on the soft cushions. Among other things he could not help wondering why he had so easily allowed this woman to humble him; though he solaced

himself with the thought that the one who had told him all of this was surely an unusual woman. Even if she were so ugly to look at. She had not flattered him, either, but he apologised to himself for her by realising that her interest in him had made her tactless.

At least, it surely was the truth that he had steeped himself in a world of flesh and cheap values, quite all his life completely ignoring every endowment given him by his earlier environment and native intelligence.

As he passed in through the library he saw, beckoning to him, the beautifully embossed leather copies of Verlaine, Pater, Baudelaire, Rossetti, Browning, that he had bought the first few weeks of their marriage. And to Jennie he mentioned, after her caress had eased off somewhat, that they ought to spend an evening reading some of them. "We've neglected decent reading for an awful long time, Jen," he said.

Jennie's remark smote him to the heart.

"Oh, you only think you're interested in *them!*" she exclaimed.

Leonard gave her one shrivelling glance and then went into his study.

She ran after him, full of perplexity, and threw her arms about his shoulders.

"Why, Leonard, boy, what's happened? You've never acted this way with me. Oh, Lennie, dear, what have I done?"

But her insistence was met only by a strange attitude of reflection.

"Just leave me alone, Jennie," he begged. "Just leave me alone. That's all I ask. There is a lot I want to think about."

When he walked over to the fire and sat down in the

big chair in front of it, she dropped on the floor at his feet and put her bare white arms around his knees.

But he tore himself loose from her and went upstairs to his room.

And neither of them answered the servant's call for dinner.

Leonard paced the floor in his room, assailed and terrified by his thoughts, while Jennie, bewildered and anxious, lay beside the chair in his study and sobbed till long past midnight. Then with throbs jerking at her heart, she stole out into the library and up the stairs to where Maxine lay sleeping. Drawing a rocker to the side of the little bed, she pulled herself back and forth, rocking rhythmically with the agonising thoughts that flew from her troubled mind to her heart.

CHAPTER IX

MABEL GILLETTE never ceased talking of art and life to Leonard Vernon.

Many times in the twilight of his office they stood looking out of the window together onto the dark expanse of the Hudson. A strange period of thought communion seemed to encompass them whenever they watched the river together in this fashion. Each little spectre of a boat as it floated by seemed a silent carrier of symbols of understanding.

After closing hour, one evening, during the earlier part of this period Vernon became better acquainted with Mabel's life story, a story that was replete with poignant mishap, always tinted by a cheerful philosophy and a blind belief in the future.

"When father died and they took me out of school, I was such a funny little thing, Mr. Vernon," she said. "They all stood around the house grief-stricken, wondering what to do about it, and when I announced that I would work and support them they seemed even more troubled, especially my mother and a little sister. My aunt, who came to us at that time, didn't count, as I hated her. She always made fun of me and said I was always cheerful because I didn't have any better sense." She halted a moment as Vernon watched her. Then she added lightly, her eyes smiling reminiscently, " 'T would have done little good to explain my philosophy and beliefs to her. She only saw things through nearsighted glasses."

Vernon grew fond of her; not the kind of fondness that bespeaks a caress or a kiss but a feeling that humbled him, even humiliated him, in the presence of this mentor of ambition.

And Mabel Gillette suddenly came into her own time of emotional unrest. One night, alone in her boarding house bedroom, she found herself wording for the first time the little postponed prayer of hope and soul-yearning that for so many years had been a companion piece to her spirit.

She said to herself over and over again, as she knelt by the side of her bed with bowed head and closed eyes: "Oh, Charitable Giver of Peace! Please, please watch over me now and be good to me. Please, please make him love me! This is my only chance. Make me good and noble so that I can give happiness to him. Please, please, make him know what I can do for him and how I can help him in his work."

Strangely, it was nearly a duplicate of the prayer that the love-crucified Jennie repeated to herself night and day throughout these months, a prayer that seared her with the knowledge that her husband, for some unaccountable reason, was tiring of her.

These were trying days for Jennie. For a time she made an effort to hold Vernon by accomplishing an even greater physical attractiveness—the only fortress of protection her love had. But days of exhausting diet and camphor massaging only seemed to tempt him to further vindictiveness in his manner.

One evening when he came in to find her rolling on the floor of her boudoir, after a receipt she had obtained through the medium of the Ladies' Home Journal, her only reward was a temper-ridden exclamation: "For God's

sake, Jennie, don't make a fool of yourself—it's disgusting."

. . . Mabel Gillette on the other hand began to thrive. For the first time in her life a man was paying some attention to her. She became filled with a greater courage. She became the possessor of a virility that had as much effect upon her mental state as it had upon her circulation.

Too, an unconscious note of shrewdness forced itself upon her intelligence. She found that, whenever she exercised her fierce proprietorship over Vernon's neglected ambitions, he gave in even more readily.

So it was not long before she launched out into the fulfilment of her new rôle with all the zeal and confidence she could muster—a scholarly Cleopatra tempting her Antony.

Incessantly she talked to him of things idealistic, hunting for examples continually, to prove her contention that he was wasting his highly endowed nature. She gave him books to read wherein passages were marked for him. By a strange coincidence, one Saturday evening, she forced upon him Rossetti's "Saint Agnes," a companion piece to the leather bound edition which so long lay mouldering on the library table. Nearly the first passage that he came across seemed to be carried to him by angelic messengers:

"Some lives of men are as the sea is, continually vexed and trampled with winds. Others are, as it were, left on the beach."

It was inopportune, as he lay in bed that night, his thoughts convoyed by a host of smiling, endearing faces,

that his wife should knock on the door and call him plaintively, in a worried, whispered voice:

"Leonard, Leonard, please come in to Maxine. I am so frightened about her."

With a smothered curse ranging in his thoughts, Vernon wheeled out of bed, put on his dressing robe, and went into the next room, where he found his wife and one of the servants bending anxiously over the writhing form of his daughter.

As he came in Jennie ran up to him with the cry: "Lennie, I am scared to death. Get the doctor, quick as you can. She's been moaning and tossing for over an hour."

He ran over to the bed, impelled more by a thrust at his conscience than by any love for the suffering child, and saw how damp was the soft, pale skin of his offspring, how matted from tears was the fine blonde hair at the temples.

And into his heart stole a momentary feeling that he might be punished in some unseen way if he did not immediately love this child as a father should, and try to save its life.

So he rushed down to the telephone and as he called the doctor's number, was even surprised that his voice should so choke with excitement.

His daughter died at five o'clock. When he stole away from the hysterical mother and went to his own room nearly an hour later, he was unable to comprehend what had happened. The shock of it seemed buried so deep in him that it could not be reached. Sitting on the edge of his bed he watched the early sun filter through the drab silk curtains, like something new born slowly gaining courage to assert itself. Somehow there seemed a mes-

sage for him in its revealing light. All was over for him in life now. He had sensed that, as life had ebbed away from his beautiful daughter.

If only he could have known before. He might have thrown all his ambitions at her hesitating feet and had real joy in building up a future for her.

In the piecemeal light reflected at his feet, the printed message began blazing now with significance:

"Some lives of men are as the sea is, continually vexed and trampled with winds. Others are, as it were, left on the beach."

And he thought "God pity me—what am I coming to?"

For over an hour he sat on the edge of his bed in a stifling silence. A procession of past events flocked to his mind. He saw himself at college, leaving his mother, his decision to be a draughtsman—then his meeting with Jennie, his marriage to her——

After that Mabel Gillette's attack found him resisting less and less. Her love for him impelled her and while he more and more welcomed her crooned-out restless words, she valiantly sequestered every spark of her own ambition for love and affection.

Until a certain afternoon, some three months later.

Day after day he was conscious that a definite decision about the future must come to pass between Jennie and himself. It got so that Jennie's alternating threats and tears made him find Mabel the only haven he could turn to.

It was about five o'clock that he met Jennie driving down the street toward the factory just as he was coming out. She was pale and her eyes looked heavy and red.

He tried to cover his surprise by casually inquiring: "You were coming in to see me?"

Pathetically she searched his face. "I think—it's best, Leonard—that we see each other."

She did not wait for him to direct the way but quietly turned and walked into the building. She seemed to take it for granted that he would follow her.

When they gained his private office and Leonard had shut the door after them, she began directly.

"Leonard, you're not happy, are you?"

He was not quite ready to have her plunge into the scene he had gone over so many times in his mind. He had pictured an entirely different procedure. He would approach her some evening, half in tears, explaining to her that it was as much for her sake as his own that they part. And now quite sternly she was confronting him. At last he managed:

"Well, Jen, I guess you know I'm not so—so very happy."

She came back instantly. "Yes, I know." Then she went into what apparently had been an arrangement in her mind for days. "We'll arrange a divorce, Leonard. I'll go out to Reno and establish a residence and you must give me what I think is necessary"—she paused for a moment, then said—"you know it will only be what is necessary—and I'll give you this freedom you're so anxious to get." She seemed on the verge of breaking down as she continued, "Of course, nothing means very much to me, and so you take over my share in the factory in the way you think is fair,—out of the profits, or any way. The house we live in is mine," she added, "so I suppose I'll keep that."

She rose from the chair, while Leonard stood watching her, quite inarticulate from the calm, sure manner in

which she spoke. Just at the door she turned. Now, for the first time her voice quivered.

"Leonard, why is it that women love you so? Why is it that even now I am doing what you want me to do in sacrificing myself?" She looked straight into his eyes. "Of course, you are handsome—every one is aware of that—but you have one fault after another. You fake, yes, just fake all the time. Everything you have ever gotten has come easy for you. You've never really worked or had to work in your whole life. And you never will. You're just so selfish. You're always thinking how some one is going to bring something to you and how you're going to take from them. You never think of how you must work to get anything. Why, in all the time we have been married, I have never seen you sit home and read and think like other men. Oh, I have watched you. Your mind is always working around yourself." She braced herself against the sill of the door and then turned away from him. His anger was rising too as he heard her say, "Yet I love you, Lennie, I'll love and worship you as long as I live. That's the funny part of it."

Then she broke down completely and, while he stood watching her, she ran down the hall. One hoarse sob after another came to his ears, until she shut the factory door after her.

In the days that followed this interview, right up to the time when he heard that Jennie, bowed and broken, had taken a train for the West, the following conviction became more and more firmly imbedded in his mind. It was this:

The real reason for his unhappiness from his youth

on was simply because of his blind and constant idealistic search for physical and material beauty and an entire ignoring of the true question of life—spiritual and mental companionship.

CHAPTER X

THAT her marriage to the broad-shouldered and shaggy-browed Lester Moore changed matters very little for her, Marcy learned soon enough. Three months passed and yet her feeling of restless unhappiness with him was just as great as when she had married him.

Somehow, they could not get acquainted.

Except for his thundering ownership, and his physical demands, there was little difference from the time when she was at home, cooking and taking care of the house for her father. She had just as much work to do and had to live in her dreams of the future quite as often if she wanted to be happy.

There was only one exception as the months passed—an occupation that made up for everything else, an occupation that she sheltered in a harbour of silence and subterfuge.

She began to make a tiny woollen jacket. All her spare time was spent at it, working in an ecstasy of excitement as if it were some game at which she must win. It was the one oasis of bliss for her, and she kept it secret and guarded.

But this was not a difficult task.

Evening after evening, Lester came in, said: "What have you got for supper, Marcy?"—sat and ate silently, morosely—then, as soon as the meal was over, threw on his coat and rushed out to some saloon or to a place where the crowds spent the night playing pool.

In these first three months he apparently grew to resent

every feeling he had ever divided with her, even the affection that he had bestowed upon her in the earlier period of their companionship.

One day at the end of July he came home hot and tired.

"Say, Marcy," he questioned, as he found her looking at the joke page of a Sunday paper, which she had hastily grabbed up as she saw him coming, "what do you do all day?"

A good deal frightened by his manner, she looked up at him.

"Why, Lester, there's a lot to do. Don't everything look nice and clean?"

He laughed derisively.

"Say, that ain't what I work all day for." Then he went on slowly, calculating, "Marcy, I've been thinking about it. I guess you better come over to the factory and get a job with the rest of the girls."

"Lester, you mean you want me to work all day at the factory?" She was bewildered by his sudden proposal.

"Sure, why not? You'd have had to do it if I hadn't married you."

"But that's why I got married," she exclaimed.

"Oh, was it?"

"Then, Lester, I wouldn't have time," she ran on, more guardedly. "There's a lot I do here that you don't know nothing about."

An hour later, after continued upbraiding from her husband, there came in defence the words she had fought hard to hush. She told him how she had been doing something other than cooking and housework, after all, and she went to the bureau drawer and held up a little

blue woollen jacket, so tiny and queer that it could not have been slipped over his closed fist. It made him laugh outright when he saw it.

But he came closer to her. "What's all this about?" he demanded.

"Why, I don't know, Lester," she answered meekly, even fearsomely, as she saw that he was strangely angered about it. "I just wanted to do it, that's all. I'm just showing it to you to show you that I haven't been doing nothing."

He was angry with her, angrier still, when she could no longer hold the tears back from her eyes. And when she tried to protect the little knitted garment from him by folding it in her arms, his indignation seemed to overwhelm him.

"Who told you to do that?" he demanded.

She tried hard to remember how she had happened to begin knitting the little jacket. All of a sudden it seemed that a mighty host of enmity for this man was overcoming her, and stifling her reason.

"Why—why, Lester," she found her throat blocking with emotion, "no one told me. I just did it. I thought —why, Lester—I thought maybe you'd like me to do it."

In another moment he jerked the garment from her and tore it into many pieces.

"I'll tend to that end of it," he said.

The garment had been precious to her. In it were stored all the secret yearnings and flooding words of love that had found no other haven. Now she could not sing to it and talk to it the way she had done for so many days. And she looked up at him, the anger she felt blazing in her eyes.

"I did it because I—because I wanted to—because

something made me do it," she cried. "Oh, I hate you, you brute."

As she stood in front of him and saw the sneering smile curve his mouth, she felt that the only release she could get from her feelings would come from tearing at his throat and beating his face. He had destroyed the thing that was closer to her than anything she had known her whole life.

"Oh! for you to do it. Oh!" she moaned, and fell limp into a chair by the table, her head buried in her arms, the while she uncontrolledly sobbed with hoarse, low cries.

When, after a period of contemplation, the husband came over to her, apparently sorry that he should have been the cause of all this fuss, she wrenched herself loose from him.

"I just want to die!" she shouted. "I just want to die!"

Moore took hold of her shoulders. He tried to be more gentle with her, though not enough to let her see that he was sorry.

"Say, Marcy," he said, "brace up; what's the use of carrying on like this?"

But she only moaned, "I'm so miserable, I'm so miserable. I hoped that the little jacket would make you know what would make me happy."

"Well, I told you when I'm ready for a kid, we'll have one—and not before, see?"

It was over an hour before he could quiet her.

Lester's revelation brought no great change, however. He kept to his habits even more studiously, fighting off now, more than ever, any sign of regret. The thought was ever pregnant in his understanding that he had lost

control of her only because of the affection which he had given her. It was no way to control your woman.

This last thought harried the boy more than anything else. It seemed a crime to spend a moment in any affection not born out of physical need. When some days later he felt her frail call for help weakening him, he stayed away from the house for two days. He needed this proof for her as well as himself, that he was a strong-minded individual.

And her lamentable entreaties, sprung from the soil that must either fertilise or become barren, found no answer in his heart or soul; her thirsting appeal for passionate regard and affection could not be slaked in his well of understanding. She might have been one of Ashur's widows for all her pitiful wail was heeded.

Six months after her marriage to Lester Moore, simple little Marcy found herself entirely estranged from the man she had married.

All the wondering she indulged in, all the scanning and searching of her understanding, failed to supply her with a plausible reason or give greater facility for working out the situation.

Her task at last came to be a simple one.

She only waited for to-morrow, accepting stoically in her queer childish way the unsatisfying lot that was plainly her share in life.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER XI

FOR a week after the settlement with his wife, Leonard Vernon indulged in a period of feverish contemplation that painfully distorted the hitherto easily disposed of problem.

Continually he told himself that now he was free; yet every thought of Miss Gillette strangely scorched him, like some invisible, white flame.

And whenever the thought confronted him that hers might be the greatest flattery, Leonard smothered the idea as one steps on a spider and crunches out its life.

It was queer indeed how his path of future endeavour stretched out in front of him.

And how he was impelled to walk that road.

It really seemed that it was a task that could only be gotten over by doing it. If Mabel Gillette had been more attractive, physically, there might have been some enjoyment in prolonging a clandestine friendship, which marriage, of course, always spoiled.

But here was so much medicine to be taken for the sake of a future mental strength.

Miss Gillette was hardly pleasing to look at, indeed a very sad comparison, whenever he thought of Jennie—in the physical sense. But had not the physical of Jennie held him stupefied for a long enough time? He had unclasped its manacles now. Of course it was only foresight that he should wed himself to the key.

Leonard took the decisive step very soon after he heard

that Jennie had obtained a divorce on the grounds of desertion.

In fact, it was just two days after the information had reached him that he, waiting until the office force had gone for the day, called Mabel in from the outer office. Very seriously he said:

"Mabel, I'm going to marry you. I don't know whether or not this will come to you as a surprise. At least you are surely aware how much I depend on you."

For fear of seeing the satisfaction on her face, he steadily scrutinised a lead pencil which he twirled with his thumb and first finger.

"I don't care what the people here will say, Mabel. You know I have fixed myself against that here at the factory. And socially, I believe our ambitions are above the habits of Hastings." He continued thoughtfully: "Yes, I want to marry you, Mabel. You have taken hold of my ambitions where I left them a long time ago." Even more meditatively, he added: "You know, it's been a long while since I've had a companion in the real sense."

As he worded this last thought, his jaws set hard.

He wanted to say much more, to talk over the art that he had given up—temporarily—of course. And how he would like to take up a little more of it again. And how she should get interested in painting so she could advise and help him.

But Miss Gillette broke in upon his contemplated statements. She wilted as a delicate flower wilts in a searing breeze.

"Oh, Leonard!" she cried. "Leonard, Leonard!"

She could say no more than that.

But he could not kiss her.

She was not another Jennie.

Although she startled him quite when she frenziedly grasped his arm with her long, thin fingers, and clung to him. Indeed, he did not exactly understand the pain of disappointment and wonderment that swept through him at the moment. He could not help looking at her in the impersonal way one surveys a stranger—and rebelling a little. He could not help asking himself if all women were transformed into a common idiocy that mounted the instant love was mentioned.

Suddenly this woman so close to him appeared to have become a good deal like Jennie, in the way she hung on him. Also he noticed that she was wearing the same sort of lace collar, with its points encircling her neck, that Jennie wore when he first met her.

There came a feeling that clutched at his heart, and choked his throat with the silent words:

"Oh God, what is life anyway? What do I keep on doing with myself? Here am I getting old, yet I am shutting out more than ever all my chances with this clinging thing tied to me. What's the matter with me?"

For the first time he was definitely conscious of her resemblance to Jennie.

When it was too late!

. . . In the days that followed, days that were only staccatoed spans of discontent, Mabel became as the accepted dregs in his cup of disappointment.

If Jennie had pawed him and bored him with her benignant caresses, Mabel's queer manner of shrinking lovemaking, of meeting him with her ghastly smile of affectionate regard, of showing unmentionable inner pain at his least brow shrivelling, pained him past endurance.

He would have undone the whole thing many times

had not everybody in the town liked her so. She soon became a force in municipal affairs, heading the sewing leagues and "anti" crusades, against everything from flies to vice. At the factory, she formed societies for the prevention of many things. She was universally loved. All of which made Vernon guard his delinquent allegiance to her with distasteful tact and precaution. For now, there seemed at stake the vitality of his ever-increasing business.

It was like being in a velvet cushioned vise from which there was no escape.

And although his visits to New York were made with more and more frequency, they never blunted the feeling that overcame him, whenever he was with Mabel; a feeling that always made him imagine her his jailer, watching for his first burst for freedom.

There came now in Leonard's career just a long period of ghastly reminiscence and slackening hope.

He could hardly face her maudlin way of meeting some unkind word of his by saying:

"Lennie, darling, you're so tired and nervous."

It wasn't difficult for him to see the very proportions of Jennie in her place; which really served to solace him a little.

Soon he actually found himself laughing at the realisation that Mabel was only the reincarnated husk of Jennie.

Even as he sat in his luxurious gold-leaf office, this sardonic contemplation was not tempered. Trying to experiment with a prognosis of his future, Mabel's face suffering with repression and enduring, instantly obtruded itself into the deep shadows of the perspective.

One Friday evening, under the guise of business pressure, he took a trip to New York and tried to break loose

from his shackles, tried to defy the realisation that the borders of his future were converging and offered no escape.

But Mabel's smiling, pain-cheery face haunted him.

It was like having some sharp projectile, a Damoclean instrument hanging over him, penetrating his pleasures, symbolising her quivering love in every pleasure cranny in which he sought a haven.

During this time Jennie began fading in on him, like some spirit form, which had lost him for a good many years and then suddenly encountered him. Standing under the eaves of the Knickerbocker Hotel at 42nd street one day a woman passed him whose physical contour was a good deal like Jennie's. Immediately there was a materialisation of the spirit. Jennie stood in front of him with her dimpled chin, her soft round cheeks and golden hair. It was nearly an hour before he could turn and go back into the bar and ask for a drink to shatter the illusion. And even then he was pursued by new conceptions of Jennie's beauty, her heavy arms, her wealth of lustrous yellow hair.

When he returned home to Mabel, nervous and irritable and she, seeing how pale and worn he looked, threw her thin arms around his neck, he actually felt as if he must push her away from him and immediately seek Jennie.

Where Jennie's arm had its cushion of fat, the bones of Mabel's elbows dug into him.

Yet Mabel complained very little about his treatment of her. And after much wondering and speculation as to why she wouldn't fight back and point out to him what he was doing, Leonard conceived the idea that in him she held forth some future metamorphosis and that with Spartan-like endurance she was only biding her time. In

a vague way he was aware, now, of the understanding that as Jennie had rolled her body on the floor after she was married so had this woman rolled her mind in the deep books of philosophy.

What bothered him most, however, was that he felt sorry for her.

He felt sorry for her, even while some fresh, commonplace remark, or some obvious quotation, which was becoming more and more a habit with her, rang painfully in his ears.

One day, he decided to walk to the factory for the exercise this would give him and Mabel went to the gate to see him off. Just as he shut it after him, she remarked, looking at the clouding sky:

"I believe it's going to rain, Leonard. Perhaps you ought to take an umbrella. You know it never rains when one has an umbrella."

Her words hounded him all day. He could not help repeating—"It never rains when one has an umbrella,"—then laughing at the horror of it.

Yet it was that same afternoon while at a Board Meeting at the factory that he saw her hanging from a rafter in the attic with a rope around her neck. He rushed home only to have Mabel meet him smiling and cheerful. And when she threw her thin arms around his neck the old regret for his alarm smote him.

Unfortunately Mabel stopped him that evening just as he was on his way to get in a night of billiards and man-conversation at the Golf Club. Hesitating, halting, as if she dared not trespass upon the borderland of his desires, she asked, simply enough:

"Where—where are you going, Leonard?"

He looked at her. A thought raced through him that

the whitened face and thin lips were the result of some long unworded decision. He wondered what he should say to her to postpone any possible argument.

"Why," he muttered at last, "I am going—out, Mabel."

Thinking to soften the moment he debonairly took his cigar between his fingers and started to kiss her; but she began to talk, slowly, suppressedly, her voice delicate, wistful, yet strangely hollow and dry. The old inquisitive softness, however, was gone.

"Leonard, tell me," she began, "are you thinking these days? Are you realising what I must go through—getting so little and giving you so little—when there is so much that I could do for you?"

As she went on she took hold of his hands. At that moment he was more conscious of her pointed fingers than ever before. Looking down at them he could see how her nails were making little blue marks in the flesh of his wrists. He felt like jerking away from her or even hurting her a little in return. Only the sickly plea of the blue veins as they showed through the thin, parched skin held him.

So he looked up, and tried to keep softness in his voice.

"Why—what do you mean, Mabel?"

"Oh," she went on earnestly, "I've had a lot of time to think, Leonard. Yesterday I was reading a passage from—from Victor Hugo. He said that our lives are only brief reprieves, a short interval in which we must do and get, and that the world soon forgets us. It made me think, Leonard, how little—you and I realise it." She looked pleadingly at him. "You know, I just want to help you, Leonard. That's all."

It was hard to know what to do. She looked so be-

seechingly at him, so pathetically, as she placed one arm against the centre table for support. Nor was it easy for him to defend himself by assailing her. Her frailty so disarmed him. Standing there he thought to himself, "If she were only a woman like other women and would fight back."

Her longing gaze on him, the while her eyes reddened and filled slowly with tears, made him feel like striking her just to force her to fight back. But in the next moment he weakened through real pity and was even on the point of apologising and telling her he would do better, when he saw how disastrous this would be to any possible lessening of her weight upon him.

So, instead, he scrutinised her imperiously, with the manner he used in business, and drawled: "I don't need any help, Mabel. I guess I'm all right. I've done pretty well, except—well, it's no use to dig up the past."

Apparently unaware of his thrust, Mabel went on persistently. A martyr-like expression encircled her eyes and her mouth trembled wearily with emotion.

"Leonard, you're neglecting yourself more than you know. Oh, Leonard, don't turn away from me. You see I just must tell you what I feel." The tears ran down her cheeks, though her face still smiled. "What is life anyway, Leonard? What's the use of all the ecstasies and sorrows if you just rush madly along, blunting day by day—oh, I can see it, Leonard, it's tragic I tell you—just blunting your brilliant mental gifts, drowning every possibility of ideal life, with your desire to make money and be successful? Oh," she whispered, coming closer to him and winding her arms around his neck—"I'm worried about you—I'm honestly sorry for you. You are too big a man to let up like this."

For a moment he suffered her embrace. It was hard to think with her tear-laden eyes confronting him. But when her lips came close to his lips he tore loose from her and stalked about the room, exasperated that her emotions should hold him mentally inarticulate. And when he saw that he was really beginning to sympathise with her he turned and excitedly grasped her arms, trying to word his thoughts before he should weaken too much. What a fool he had been indeed, to get into the clutches of this ugly, hysterical woman.

"Look here," he said. "I don't want you worrying about me. What do you suppose has gone on in my mind—since you seem to want to talk about *mind?* Don't you suppose I have been thinking all these years? Well, I have, and I'll tell *you* something. I've blundered. I've made a mistake. I'm a fool. What do I care about this 'ecstasy of life' business? I'm not an artist hunting for emotional climaxes. I was once, but I stopped as soon as I saw what life really meant. And I'll tell you now, things like that are meant to solace failures. And I am a success. And I *mean* to be a success."

Her mouth dropped open with surprise, as he went on, even more vindictively than ever.

"Well, you had just as well know it, Mabel. I am trying to get down to earth. From now on I'm going to take what everybody else takes and be happy. All the stuff you've fed up on means nothing to me."

Leonard looked at her steadily, now. Two thoughts raced with appalling rapidity through his mind. One was that he could word with so much facility an idea that he had never before been able to approach; the thorny cactus which had always been in the middle of his rose bed of intentions but which he had never dared—

touch with ungloved fingers. The other was that he could word so easily an idea, every proportion of which was, he knew, a lie, to his craving for an ideal emotional life.

Yet he went on, slowly and confidently, fighting the more against her as he saw the thin dilated nostrils and quivering lips.

"No, Mabel, we haven't time for such things. We've got to stick closer to natural laws. Do you see what I mean? Jennie—understood."

Mabel interrupted him, her words ringing out unnaturally, falsetto with emotion.

"Leonard! Leonard! You mean you have made a mistake with me? You mean you don't love me, Leonard? You mean that you haven't all the time?"

Then she turned from him, her hands holding her temples, and again clutching at the air, as if she might draw out of the walls some defence for her plea.

Leonard walked out into the hallway, for no apparent reason stopping to turn on the orange coloured wall lamp, just inside the door-arch. "I guess I'll go now, Mabel," he said. "Maybe it's best we have had this understanding. Maybe"—he blew a perfect ring with the grey smoke of his cigar—"maybe we can cut out some of this highbrow stuff. I'm pretty sick of it." He thought a moment. "After all, Mabel, you know we never talked about *love*, anyway. You think about it." His eyes roamed up and down her form. A thought struck him that while he was at it he might as well make his apparent defence as strong as possible. "This mental business is making you thin. Better try taking a couple of raw eggs and milk every once in a while."

He hesitated again.

"You need fattening, Mabel," he said as he passed out of the door.

. . . . . .

It was an interesting coincidence that he should receive a special delivery letter the next morning from his mother in Ohio which, by some strange chance, mocked his every thought.

"My dear son:" it said.

"I wonder how you are getting along with Mabel, your wife. I'm so afraid, my boy, that you're not happy. There's no one here I can talk to. You are simply a great success in the East, but a mother has the right to pour out her thoughts to her own boy, and, my darling, I want you to understand what I am going to say.

"Last night I sat by the window until nearly midnight just picturing you in my mind, and how you and Mabel were with each other.

"It's no use to lie about it, I guess. The very few letters that you send to me tell me how worried and unsatisfied you are. Leonard, I believe you've got a very good woman for a wife. It isn't easy to find love in this world and there are so many different kinds, we must try to be sensible enough to know which is the best for us.

"Leonard, Mabel, from your description, is not beautiful, but don't you think when the heart is good and unselfish there is just as much beauty in it as there is in some pretty face?"

For a half dozen pages she wrote of how he must be more contented and appreciate the thin dark Mabel.

For the first time he threw a letter from his mother in the tin waste basket at the side of his desk without a second reading.

CHAPTER XII

THE next day, Leonard was called into New York on a bit of business that required sitting in a close, over-heated office until late in the afternoon, discussing the different phases of an offer made by a larger and rival concern, the Wheelland Ornamental Company, to form a possible partnership and have an aggressive New York office.

When he came out into Times Square at five o'clock he felt as if he had spent just so much time in jail. The constant haranguing and bickering over the advantages to be gained and the apportionment of interest, had bored him beyond endurance. An especially trying time had been had with a man named Whittimore, one whom he had always thought rather charming in previous interviews but who showed himself now to have an aggravating desire for definite figures that left nothing to chance.

At the cigar stand of the Knickerbocker Hotel Leonard stopped to buy a long panetela-shaped cigar. It was some satisfaction to get away from the money-mad men and to have the dark, round little woman back of the glass stand say:

"A Bock panetela, as usual, Mr. Vernon?"

As he replied, "Yes—Miss," he wondered what her name might be. For so many years she had waited upon him, always with her pleasing smile and correct understanding of his wants. As he walked away he thought to himself that she, too, must have some intimate trouble

that hung over her all day. Perhaps a husband, or a sweetheart who harassed her. "Guess I'm not the only one," he thought. "We've all got our battles."

However, as Vernon passed through the lobby toward the revolving doors, he gave a sweeping glance at the many women, sitting or standing about—a glance which darted even as far as the gold raftered dining-room, thrown out as a fisherman casts his fly.

Only one of them held him for an instant. Though she was young and pretty, her face had a look of experience and world-wisdom which acted as a barrier to further scrutiny.

. . . All day long, the tall buildings and the crowds had conjured old sights and memories before him; his heart ran over with homesickness for what was no more. The very monuments of brick and stone seemed to whisper:

"You see, here you used to be happy."

But also there was vaguely present in his mind, the thought that now he had freed himself from Mabel, and that new vistas were open to him. It was as if the dark cavern of his past enduring had been opened and out of it had winged their way all the harassing thoughts of his wasted years. There really was a greater content brooding in his being than he had known for a long time.

Walking up Broadway, with chest out and shoulders back, which made his grey walking suit fit unusually well, he thought how different he was from all the people who passed him, the actors out of jobs with their careless apparel, the rough-looking men with weak faces, who lined the curbs—suddenly he felt ashamed that he should be seen walking in this district.

So at Forty-Fourth Street, he turned and went across

town to the more adorned trumpery of Fifth Avenue. "Here," he thought, "New York puts on a varnished mask over her harlot's heart, and doesn't betray herself." And with his muscles echoing to the will of his mind, he assumed a more elastic, tripping manner in his gait, while with his cane he cut the air every few steps. As he walked, he noticed how women turned and gave him a second glance. One with white spats and soft blue tailored suit, smiled at him, and when he turned to look after her, he saw that she had halted to examine the contents of a show-window. He was on the point of turning to follow her when she looked up to see if he had noticed. But again there was the look of experience in her eyes and about the corners of her mouth, for all its veneer of cosmetic artifice, played fine, anxious lines of a spent youth.

It was easy to project into his mind the whole routine of what would follow. So he turned and walked on. "Poor thing," he reflected to himself. "Poor thing!"

Reaching Forty-seventh Street, he paused again, undecided as to what he should do, wondering if he should really spend his evening with one of these women whose looks bespoke such cordial invitation for adventure. Why shouldn't he after all? It had been a long time, in truth, not since his marriage to Jennie that he had been really stimulated by a touch or a caress. Everything spoiled under the memory of his home.

But now he had rid himself of a greater part of this foolish allegiance. Only he must not be cheap about it. He must match up somewhere near his own understanding and superior manners and intelligence. He wondered if there really were some one in this crowd, some woman, young and pretty, who would admire him and understand what a fight he was having with life; what it meant to

have to smother every emotion. Some one perchance, who, however beautiful, needed him and who was not so well tutored but what he could mould her and teach her his views of life.

It would be good to find some one like that. Then he would have work to do. That was what he really needed. Some one he could build up. Then he could come to New York oftener, too. And be a little kinder to Mabel at home. If he knew exactly when his hour of relief would come he could afford the period of hypocrisy with her.

Reasoning that this was the thing to do, Vernon walked on, slowly, thinking how different it was now from a few years before. He was a success in life. Also he had been using women in the wrong way up to now, without judgment or foresight. And like a boomerang, they had come back to him. Now it must be different. After all, experience was a good thing when it taught a lesson. And it was too late to grieve about it anyway. He had needed those women. One paid one's price for knowledge. But his youth had paid its price. And time was too ghastly a coin to deal with. After all, maybe his failure was not his fault. Perhaps it was simply that he, being an intellectual, was too subtle for the ordinary woman, and for the same reason, not audacious enough for the more clever ones. Yes, there must be a new era in the management of his life.

He walked on, thinking. Was he a success after all? Everything was no more solved than it had ever been. Life—life—what a sad joke. And so many grew excited about it, too! Really there was little hope, little chance even, of ever being truly happy. Unless one had some sort of—anæsthetic—to dull the senses—and create lying illusions. Just posed before oneself. After all, was not

posing the only protection that unhappy people and lonely people had for themselves? But perhaps that really was his trouble. Perhaps he had never got inside of himself, because he had had to pose for himself so much.

As Leonard went on and became less conscious of those passing him, a feeling of unhappiness stole more into the heart of his reveries. He thought of his mother, so believing, so simple, so blind to anything that was not virtue in him.

At the moment, his throat actually choked up. He thought nearly aloud:

"Oh, mother darling, if you were only by me and could help me all the time——"

Yes, he decided, a man needed a woman's solace and help. Scientific groping about to stiffen the mind was all right, philosophising was all right, if one were already fixed in life. But philosophy was only a name unhappy people gave to their thoughts and helped little.

He turned and slowly walked back toward the Grand Central Station. In his mind was the idea that there, perhaps, he would be more likely to run across an adventure, some one disappointed by waiting, some woman suddenly assailed by a little madness in her heart, as must happen some time or other to all women.

At the corner of Madison Avenue and Forty-second Street, he did pass a woman whose glance he caught, and decided to follow her; only to change his mind for some reason that had to do with the way her skirts lashed her white shoe-tops. Also she halted a little in her steps as if to wait for him.

So he kept on toward the station while on his face became more and more defined a peculiar expression of an-

guish and expectancy—the expression that he discerned in the eyes of the others as they passed him, seeking their mates along the Avenue.

Reaching the station, he went down through the entrance and onto the stone-paved incline to the great open place backed on the far side by the numbered track entrances. Stopping at a news-stand, he bought a magazine with a multi-coloured front page; a magazine dedicated mostly to women's wearing apparel and dogs and the doings of the Smart Set. As he took the change from the man back at the counter, he said to himself: "It's best to appear interested in something."

He decided to stand near the information bureau, where four or five women were already waiting. A thrill of satisfaction went through him at the thought that before him was an adventure that might be just the thing he had been waiting for so many years.

One of the young women in particular attracted him. She could not have been more than twenty-two or twenty-three years old. He saw, too, as he came closer to her, that her slender figure was just a bit too flashily dressed.

That she was tired of waiting, however, was very apparent from the way her eyes sought the different entrances and then the clock over her head. When Leonard took his stand quite close to her he perceived with some satisfaction that her glance took him in too. Then the charm of a possible acquaintance with her was somewhat dulled when he made out two well-defined splashes of rouge on her cheeks and a perfection to her brows that were no benevolent adornments of nature.

Now, he thought: "Well, beggars mustn't be choosers," and decided that conquest with her might even be easier than with some one more refined. The main thing was

to make her understand that this good-looking man beside her was also tired of waiting.

For five minutes he tried to seem interested in what really was a page of dog advertisements, when a sudden impulse compelled him to look up. He found that she was observing him. Allowing a smile to spread over his face, he folded the magazine as if preparing to depart.

There was a faint, but discernible irritation about her lips and eyes.

It was a little disappointing that she should be conquered so easily, but it was too late to retrace the step. He lifted his hat and said cordially: "It's stupid, isn't it, waiting?"

"Yes, quite," she answered. Her smile was rather attractive.

He wondered what he should say next. Presumptuousness might anger her, yet hesitancy could be even a greater blunder.

"I—I expected some one on the 6:10 from Albany. I guess they are not going to show up."

His next step was even more difficult, for she only grinned at him in her knowing way, without a reply.

He went on:

"I wonder when the next Albany train gets in?"

Still she smiled in her really aggravating manner. "Why don't you ask the Information Bureau?" she at last suggested.

"That's right," he said, and turned to the man who was answering the questions of a little woman with a baby in her arms and another dragging at her skirt.

Authoritatively he questioned: "Will you tell me the time of the next Albany train?"

The man looked at him. "In or out?" after he finished with the little woman.

Vernon saw a broad smile cover the face of the girl at his side. He looked at the officious questioner back of the counter. "Why, in," he managed. The thought struck him that he was not conducting this affair in the right way. He should have gone up to her at the very first smile, and said: "I'm tired of waiting, so are you. Let's—merge our disappointment and go to dinner." Yes, perhaps it was not too late, yet.

He turned to her, and with a laugh said: "What's the use of waiting? Let's go over to the Belmont and get a—something to eat."

As they walked across the street she said to him, quite to his surprise, "You know, as we stood there I was wondering how long it would be before you asked me to do just this. You men are so funny."

"You knew I was going to ask you?" he questioned.

"Sure I did."

Vernon looked at her. "Weren't you waiting for some one?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who?"

Now she laughed outright. "Why, you, silly boy!"

A wave of regret encompassed him. He had planned such a romantic and charming adventure.

After checking his light grey coat, cane, gloves and hat at the crude rack, which he did slowly and methodically as if to show the girl he was unaffected by this sort of adventure, he erectly led the way into the low ceiled grillroom of the hotel. Following the headwaiter, they sat down at a side table, halfway down the room.

At the side of her chair a window was open and for

another moment he was occupied in directing the waiter to close it.

"All the dirt from the street blows in," he said solicitously.

"Oh, I don't mind."

Her voice was not lacking in charm and he resumed his place somewhat reassured.

Then he glanced at the amber-coloured light on the table and was on the point of turning it out, with an excuse that it was too strong for his eyes, when he saw that the glow really softened the hard lines of her painted cheeks. Vernon noticed that she looked rather attractive.

He gave an order to the waiter and very soon a large tray with hors d'œuvres was placed between them.

Vernon exclaimed: "I'm really hungry, aren't you?" And the girl replied with a little laugh:

"Sure, I am. Let's order a drink."

Vernon looked at her. Quite on the point of moralising about the effect of liquor on young women, he checked himself, and instead, quickly entered into her mood.

"What's the matter with me?" he exclaimed. "Waiter! Waiter!"

At her direction, two pinkish drinks, covered with a foamy cream, were brought in. Then another waiter poured out a rich, heavy soup.

Without apparent thought of whom the other might be, they began to talk of current gossip; a story which was adorning the front page of all the newspapers; about a society woman who had married a policeman; the new show at the Winter Garden. Vernon entered into the conversation in his best manner, telling himself it would do no harm to let her know he was different from the ordinary business man. Also there sprang into his mind

the idea which he soon worded, that they visit the music hall. He added: "I'm so busy that I haven't been able to see the new show yet."

He spoke in a casual way, as though it were his custom to visit all the theatres.

The young woman confessed that she had one or two friends who were connected with the theatre, and that she had seen the new show at least a half dozen times. And Vernon, toying with his fork, and drawing criss-cross lines on the white table cloth, suddenly looked up and said: "I haven't been going out as much as I wanted to, lately. A man's a fool to get wrapped up—in his business, isn't he?"

After a moment the girl replied, with an apparent effort to match his mood: "Yes, you bet, you only live once."

The roast beef they had ordered was being placed on the table when the head waiter approached Vernon, and, in a whispered voice, suggested a nice light wine, and handed him a wine-list, at the top of which stood in large letters CHAMPAGNES.

"I suggest No. 123," said the man, "if the lady doesn't mind a dry wine."

He looked at the young woman, who glanced at Vernon in rather bored fashion and said, casually: "Why, I think you'd like the No. 130 better. It's Pommery."

Vernon gave the order and in an amazingly short time their glasses were being filled by the head waiter's assistant.

"This is really a delicious wine," exclaimed Vernon, and they drank slowly, sipping their glasses and looking into each other's eyes in a silent toast. For the first

time he was really conscious of the dreamy strumming from a hidden orchestra.

Vernon went on: "You know I've been in a rut for an awfully long time. It's good for me to get out like this now and then." He told her this rather earnestly.

She replied, a little quizzically, "You are married, aren't you?"

He took another gulp of wine, and then murmured with an air of reflection: "Yes, a little too much married."

Somewhat disdainfully, but with a decided tone she remarked: "Well, all the fools aren't dead yet."

A little put out by her lack of sympathy, Vernon called the waiter to refill his empty glass. This he drank in almost a swallow.

Then both began to eat and the conversation lagged. Once he looked up, and said: "You know, it's too bad about little episodes like this. We can't appreciate them until we have the next one. Then it's too late." He added sadly, "Life is like that, I guess."

She waited until he was sipping at his third glass of wine before she ventured: "Yes, when they come so few."

"Do you have many?"

She waited until some effect showed itself from his last drink before she dared: "Now, don't be a fool."

Vernon leaned back in his chair and studied her. His face had grown quite red and his forehead was damp with perspiration, which he mopped with a blue-bordered silk handkerchief, now and then.

"You're a wise little girl, aren't you?" he exclaimed.

Ice cream was placed on the table and then two small cups of black coffee. As Vernon lifted the little cup the while he waited for her reply, his hand trembled visibly.

Finally she answered: "I've got to be." Opening her

purse she took out a cigarette. "Everybody is not as easy as you are."

Vernon leaned across the table and took hold of her hand rather frenziedly: "Am I easy, little girl?"

"Oh, sure—you are—up to now."

It was exasperating to have her command the situation with so much calm scrutiny of him. Thinking that they would never get better acquainted as long as they talked so impersonally, he said:

"I hate to see a beautiful little girl like you, ready to be trampled down by the first big steam roller that comes along. No woman can look out for herself. She needs some man—to watch out for her and take care of her." As he said this she laughed outright and then proceeded to take a little white powder puff from her pocketbook. Powdering the tip of her nose the reflection of which she peered at in a small silk backed mirror, she exclaimed, "You poor, poor thing," the while Vernon fought back the sudden understanding that it would be indeed difficult to train her into manners refined enough to accompany him about the restaurants and hotels.

She seemed even a little disgusted with the look of affection and endearment that had come into his eyes. Drawing her hand away from his clammy fingers which again had sought hers, she said: "And I suppose you want to be that man, don't you? Why, if you've got a wife," apparently observing the effect of her words, "you had better go back to her and consider yourself lucky."

Vernon was aroused by this unexpected turn in his love seeking. He was thinking how stupid of him it was to allow this little painted creature to assail him; though he solaced himself as he had often done when meeting some one who showed they didn't care for him. by think-

ing she was trying to be elusive and clever with him so as to attract him the more.

Reaching into his pocket he took out a small leather case. From it he drew a bill and crumpling it, tossed it across the table to her, saying: "There's five dollars. I guess you'd better go."

Laughing derisively, the girl took the crumpled bill and thrust it into the small bag lying beside her on the table, then rose from the table. "You are very kind," she said, in a mock effect at humility; "only next time, don't try to do the big brother stunt. It's old stuff."

Vernon watched her as she walked pertly through the swinging doors and up the few steps to the sidewalk. The last glimpse he had was of two well-formed, silk-stockinged ankles.

He began to reflect. What a pity it was that he could not have taken just such a girl as that and moulded her to his own ideas. It wouldn't have been such a difficult process to make her a really charming creature. She was not doll-like, or stupidly pretty, and not so old in this worldly business that the trading had left its mark.

It was a real disappointment, with an after thought that, strangely, she had not appreciated him like most other women.

It was after some little time of this self-interrogation that Vernon decided this sudden demise to his pleasure seeking was really his own fault. He had been held down so long by the ties of his marriage to Mabel and the business, that he had lost that manner of worldliness which is attractive to women.

As he sat lost in thought his eyes rested on the bill in front of him with some figures in blue pencil at the bottom of a long column. And it came to him how

stupid it was to try to buy real affection, which could come only through the communion of spirits. He had made a mistake, he saw, but reflected that this must not discourage him. Some one, somewhere, must be waiting for him and seeking as he was seeking. As he fingered the cardboard reminder of his meal, a fusillade of thoughts shot through him. What a horrible scheme it was that society had forced upon life. One was at the mercy of chance. Was he going to be buffeted about through the years? He was nearly forty now. "Why, I'll be an old man in five years," he found himself repeating aloud.

And then the factory, too. Why, it was getting so that he was held accountable for the success of his business by the very workmen he hired. That was one of the biggest jokes of all.

The sound of his own voice startled him and he glanced around nervously. Calling the waiter he then paid his check and after his glass had been refilled and its contents gulped down, he rose and stalked from the room.

A little dizzy from the wine, Leonard brushed shoulders with a man coming in, and the man flung an angry retort after him which he heard only vaguely.

Stopping at the head of the stairs for a moment, he glanced down the hall to the dining room where people were sitting at rows of white covered tables. Just the faintest murmur of the orchestra caught his ears and held him by its soft strains.

When the musicians stopped he walked across the lobby and down the steps of the grill to the front of the bar where he ordered a pint of wine from the bartender. And when it was served, he drank it as if it had been some adversary that he must conquer. There was a table

near by and much more tispy than he had been, he made his way over to it and sat down. He began to reflect: Why did all these men sitting around look so prosperous and happy? Why was it they were so gay about life?

One man in particular he noticed, a man quite his own age, who was talking animatedly to a companion. He had clear eyes and pink soft skin like a child's. Vernon could just catch the words: "I'm the happiest man alive. You know that makes our third one. The other two are girls." He was talking about his family. Perhaps that was the secret of it after all. Just to have a wife and children and come home at night and have their arms around your neck and be called "Daddy."

With his eyes fixed on the stranger, Vernon thought on, angrily aroused against the combinations in his life that seemed always to work against him. "Why is it so hard," he questioned nearly aloud, "for me to be happy?" He began tearing to bits a printed menu that lay on the table. "Haven't I just as much right to happiness as the next one? Why is everything always set against me?"

The sound of his own voice made Vernon shudder. He glanced at the men at the next table, but they were immersed in their conversation. Suddenly the room became very hot. He took his hat and plunged up the steps to the street.

Here there was a hurrying crowd, people rushing to the theatre, and to and from their trains. Some were going home. Tall buildings, like so many towers of Babel, stretched up into the night's blackness, while lighted areas here and there in the black mass told of some office clerk working overtime. It made him feel that they were signals of distress flashed from some companion sufferer.

Then he noticed a young fellow in a light grey suit and new tan shoes, running toward the station entrance with a great basket of fruit under his arm. Probably hurrying to some young wife who would meet him with open arms.

Vernon mopped his hot head as he thought: "Good God, just to have some one waiting for you like that." He wondered what Mabel was doing. Probably she was waiting for him. Yes, she really must be. She always was waiting for him, like a dog waiting for its master.

That was the main trouble with her.

A strange doubt assailed him. A doubt of himself. He had been making Mabel unhappy and finding many reasons to justify himself in doing so and now he was suddenly stumbling over the fact that he might be throwing away something which he ought to keep, and was lucky to have.

Never before had he felt so lonely. None of the passersby in their mad hurry to some waiting one stopped to notice him.

Passing a café, he saw his face reflected in a mirrored sign. For a moment he was stifled, meeting himself like that. He saw how enormous his eyes were, how unnaturally pale was his face. The merciless light of an overhead sign threw a strange shadowy glare under his eyes and cheeks. His face looked hollowed out, hard, wolfish, pasty. And the thought hit him that if he should suddenly be laid low in that crowd no one would know him or even care about him. He had a nervous heart. The insurance doctor had told him that not so long ago. For a flashing moment he saw himself lying unconscious on the pavement—with the crowd around him.

And a policeman hunting for some identification.

Mabel was probably in the library, reading some book in her quiet way, and looking up at the clock every once in a while. Or, perhaps, she had gone to bed already and was lying awake worrying about him. Across his mind came a picture of the way she had taken him to the door that morning, and said: "Dear, do be careful to-day."

The illuminated clock on the façade of the station showed nine-fourteen. There was a train at nine-fifteen. He might make it if he ran. Mabel would be sitting in the chair by the reading table. She would be so happy when he came in. And it wouldn't hurt him to sit and talk to her a little while.

So he ran across the street and into the station and was the last passenger on the train. He had a real fright when his foot slipped as he hurriedly jumped into the moving coach.

All the way up to Hastings he slept soundly. It was an accommodation train and took much longer than usual, so that by the time he got off and walked through the crisp night air to his home, the ill-effects of his drinking had worn off; though when he unlocked the door and entered the dark vestibule, he regretted a little that he had come, wondering why he had not stayed in town and gone to a show.

The lights were turned out in the library and he mounted the steps towards Mabel's room, deciding to go in and greet her and talk a little.

Mabel's door was closed and he opened it gently.

When he went in, his wife lay asleep, with the electric bedside lamp shining directly on her face. Near her hand was a crumpled handkerchief and he noticed how damp it was. He looked down at her pale and drawn face.

He noticed how high her cheekbones were and in what deep recesses her small eyes were placed. She really looked like an old woman with her hair drawn back from her forehead, and her thin arms protruding from the lacy short-sleeved nightgown. The thought struck him as he gazed onto the bed that the soft pattern was worthy of a better tenant.

Then he turned and went out of the room again, and into his own. Slinging his hat and coat into a chair, he sat down on the edge of the bed. For a long time he sat thinking, before he bent over and began unlacing his shoes.

He kept saying to himself: "What a fool I am."

And back of that thought was another:

He must get away from Mabel.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG his fellow workers young Lester Moore, the boor at home, the selfish, brutish churl, was somewhat of a leader. He was always friendly with them, and took the initiative in their evening meetings. He liked to be a big man at the smoke-laden meeting of the Lead Workers' Union No. 55, held every Friday night over the Miller Grocery Store, on Walnut Street.

He had ideas about common rights and drove them home with sincere purpose and though his ideas bore no greater intelligence than came from the mouths of the more modest members, he still had a virility and nerve back of his words that gave his thoughts forcible deliverance.

It was all the more startling then, considering his position at the factory, when he heard one day that he was actually among those included in a general lay-off brought on by some merger with a New York firm.

That night over fifty men met at the hall to discuss the situation. In and out among them floated various rumours; Vernon was in a bad way, he had lost a big contract, he was being swallowed up by a big city corporation, he was away from the factory over half the time and had neglected his business. Other words were whispered about his domestic affairs—he was unhappy at home.

In one corner Moore met Neil, who had just come out of a flaming denunciation of his employer.

"Hello," said Moore to the temper-shaken old man.

"Hello! Hello!" Neil grumbled, and then launched forth into the hanging ends of his tirade. "So he's done it, and you too, eh, boy. We ought to kill him, the low dog."

At the further end of the hall a young fellow with black hair and a blazing red necktie, named Jim Sylvester, got up and began speaking. His voice came through the tobacco smoke, sharp and cutting. Neil stopped talking, and with every one else began to listen attentively. Every now and again, as some remark stood out and brought a few cheers, he shouted: "You're right, you're right," ending up with some wild curse.

Lester, too, was held for a moment. Then he took the old man's arm. "Now, what's the use of going crazy over this thing," he said; "what are we going to do about it? We're laid off. That's all there is to it, see." It bothered him that every one should hang so approvingly on to the words of the speaker.

The meeting broke up early, without anything definite being accomplished, although for some time after, they stood around in sympathetic groups, talking and planning, little eddies on the surface of unsounded depths. Once in a while some voice would rise above the others and gain the attention of another group and then both groups would join and listen together.

All the talk was centred on Vernon.

Full blame was put upon his shoulders. "He should have managed better." "He didn't attend to business." "His wife could have run things better than he did." "Too fond of goin' to New York."

As Lester stood listening, he looked about him. On all sides he saw men standing silent, with their heads

strained to catch every word. Now and then he could see them turn to each other in affirmation of the speaker's argument. He saw how red their faces were with anger and excitement. Suddenly it occurred to him they were apart from him, that they had left him out of the general discussion. He wondered why *he* had lost his power over them, or if he really had. Why couldn't he think of something to say, something that would make them turn and listen to *him?*

But somehow he could think of nothing else but his own plans, his own way out of the difficulty. And as this thought struck him, he looked around feeling even more weak and guilty, as if he were cheating the men.

Noticing that Neil was still at his side, he turned to him, at just about the moment a great scheme had wormed its way into his mind, an idea that so pleased him, he hated to part with it at once. Taking Neil's arm he said, under his breath:

"Let's get out of here," and then, "Listen to me. I want to know if they've got anything on him. Forget your own troubles—something has just come to me.

Neil looked into the boy's eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Well"—Lester ran the idea over in his mind before he went on, "I mean—about these New York trips. Do you think he's got himself in trouble? Does he go around much in the city, do you think—gambling, women and that business?"

Neil broke into a laugh. "Sure, he does. He always did. But now he's so rich you can't get a line on him."

The boy thought a moment. "Let's go home," he said; "I've got a lot I've got to think about."

Marcy was in bed when he entered the green shingled cottage and the lights were out. Without much care

for noise, he went into the bedroom, and looked at her sleeping face, intending to arouse her and tell what was in his mind.

He called her once, and then, as she did not awaken, he decided to wait till morning.

"It can wait," he thought. "It'll keep." But it was a great plan he had in mind.

It was an hour, however, before he could close his eyes in the least semblance of sleep. And as he lay awake he thought again how exciting and disappointing the day had been. The crowd had not listened to him as they always did. Instead, it seemed as if, in losing his position, there had gone along with it, his position among the men. It made him hate Vernon more than ever.

Marcy was sleeping soundly at his side, and somehow he could not help turning and studying her and thinking that his plan was the first opportunity he had ever had of evening up with her for having married him.

It was mighty lucky, he reflected, that he had struck upon this way out of his difficulties. And it would be safe, too. If his plan worked out, he would be able to laugh at the others. It would be a good return for their having ignored him. He breathed deeply as he thought on. And what a great joke it would be on Vernon, the man who wouldn't even shake hands with any of his employees. If he worked out his scheme . . . a hot whirlwind of selfish ambition rushed through his senses . . . he would be safe, too. And beyond that, there loomed a vista of even greater security. If only he did not lose his nerve. And his plans worked out.

The next morning at the breakfast table, he said to Marcy:

"Marcy, I want you to see Mr. Vernon to-day. I want you to get a job. You can do it. Take anything he'll give you." His voice was unusually kind. "And fix yourself up in your best. Don't wear that long blue dress. Wear something shorter. I want him to see how pretty you are."

Her protest was smothered by him.

"I mean what I say," he said, a little harder. "Do you hear me? I mean it. And after he hires you, I want you to sort of let him know whose wife you are, too—and that he's laid me off."

Now, she was genuinely surprised. "Lester, he's laying you off?"

He looked silently ahead. "Yes, he's laying me off with a bunch of others."

"Oh, that's awful, Lester. What will we do? We haven't got anything saved up, have we?"

Lester walked over and patted her cheeks. "I knew you'd see it, Marcy, old girl," he said. "That's the reason I want you to see Mr. Vernon, and have him like you—a little. It might help a whole lot."

When he saw her hesitating the boy went on, telling himself that she must not have too much time to think about it. So he hurriedly told her how much depended on her, and how happy they would be once they got on their feet. He was really kind to her for the first time in months. He gently touched her little hands and looked into her violet eyes as he talked.

And all the fearsome things Marcy had heard about Vernon's mastery over those who came near him, flew away on the wings of her husband's happy voice.

It meant a lot to have some one kind to her like that, and to be able to do something for him. Also she

thought, how wonderful it would be to just see Mr. Vernon and talk to him. Then, if she pleased Lester, she could always keep him affectionate and nice to her. And that was nicer than having him always so gruff and mean.

So she said, smiling at him cosily: "Shall I wear that dress I married in, Lester?"

Eying her shrewdly, he answered: "You got the right idea, old pal."

And for the first time in many months Marcy felt gay and kind toward her husband, as one feels who has spent days in fog and suddenly comes into sunshine. She was even playful and paraded about in front of him with graces he had never before seen in her—saying, as she swept before him, "Now look at me. Won't you be jealous! I'll be so grand."

Moore sat back and laughed, thinking as he watched her: "Poor kid—poor kid."

He was somehow sorry for her.

She noticed this and came to his side, pouting: "Well, don't you want me to, Lester?"

"Why, of course, Marcy. Ain't I the one that's begging you to do it?"

Coming close to him, she took his face in both her little hands and studied him, as if to search for some possible thought smirking behind his eyes that would give the lie to the words which had made her so happy; murmuring the while: "Oh, Lester, you've all said so much—such awful things about Mr. Vernon. I'm afraid."

Her smooth, round arm was touching his own, her velvety pouting lips were close to his, and an instant's emanation of selfishness that he could hardly control, shot through the boy. But he fought past it in a moment, and

when he replied: "Why, Marcy, you needn't be afraid—why, he'll just fall over himself to be nice to you, if he ever sees you," he felt that he was surer of himself than ever. "Sure, he'll be nice to you," he said again, daring to touch her sleeve, the while he reasoned how foolish it would be not to follow out his plan. And when he petted her hand affectionately, Marcy felt satisfied.

After all, it was nice of him, and unselfish, she thought, to let her go to Vernon.

For a moment they stood silently, and Marcy realized it was the first time in weeks they had been so close to each other. In that instant it struck her that now might be a good time to make Lester see how he had neglected and mistreated her.

So she said suddenly with an effort to make her remark casual, as if it were only at this moment that she had thought of it, "Oh, Lester, I wish you'd be nicer to me." She reached her hand up to his face. Why shouldn't she let him know how unhappy she was? "You know I think a lot—about you and me."

"You do?" he questioned.

Now that she had given in, there remained nothing further to do. But as a sudden dejection spread over her face he thought it best to humour her. She seemed so harmlessly happy, anyway. And so, he in turn, gently touched her face, saying, "Why, what's the matter, Marcy?"

Marcy thought for some little time. Never before had he seemed so kind. But it was easy to see that he was not thinking of her. She got up and walked away from him, slowly, meditatively, and went into the next room, while

Lester heard her say, feebly: "Oh, nothing, I guess I'd better dress."

She shut the door after her, and it was hardly a moment before he heard her begin the fragment of her little tune, which relieved him a good deal. It was a good joke on her.

He had made her happy by getting her to do something from which *he* would reap the reward.

The song came to him in her queer little voice.

"I'd rather have him and his fifteen a week,
Than be some old millionaire's doll,
He's the best thing what wuz, and I love him becuz
He's my pal, he's my pal."

He sat down at the table and listened, his thick lips pursed, his lids half closed, his heavy arm swung over the side of the chair. He remembered how he had first met her, how he had been attracted to her when she, with a dozen other girls from the factory and the village, had made up a hay-ride party along the river. He remembered how pretty her round little legs were as they hung over the side of the wagon, and how, with the girls' arms around their necks, they had all sang lustily:

"I'd rather have him and his fifteen a week,
Than be some old millionaire's doll."

As he thought about it now, realising how childlike and innocent she was, and how he was using her, he could not help feeling a little sorry.

"Poor kid, poor kid," he thought . . . while his smoking pipe swayed back and fro in the hand that hung over the chair's arm.

Once he called to her: "Hurry, Marcy, hurry——"

Mostly he kept on thinking: "When he likes her—it'll be easy."

CHAPTER XIV

MARCY, an accomplice in her husband's scheme, was made so through the same innocence that sent her from Lester's side to Vernon's, acquiescent and pliable, like a reed that bends to the wind.

It was when she saw the familiar enough, long, red wall and the iron gateway of the Clemons Art Glass Works that she became really afraid for the first time and wondered if it had been wise of Lester to make her see his employer. Hesitant, she entered the long, bare waiting room and took her seat as near as possible to the aged clerk in charge, while her vision took in a huddling crowd of people, girls and boys she knew and had played with, and bent over men and women, all waiting for an interview with the important Mr. Vernon.

Sitting on the hard bench, after she had hesitatingly told what she wanted, to the old man at the desk, she wondered if Vernon would be mean and horrid the way everybody said he was. She remembered the first time she had ever seen Mr. Vernon. It was seven or eight years before and she was playing in the street in the front of her home; a car went past; a very handsome man and a woman with blonde hair were sitting inside. How they all had to run out of the way, whispering, after they had reached the sidewalk: "There go the Vernons!"

And now she was sitting in his office. Soon she would see him.

When the clerk motioned to her she had become so nervous she could hardly move—shot through with fear.

But she managed to walk to the desk, controlling any outward sign of her nervousness.

Then disappointment pounded at her ears.

"Mr. Vernon's secretary cannot see you to-day, Miss. They don't need any one."

"Do you mean—that I can't see him?" she begged.

"Not to-day. Come back to-morrow, if you want."

She saw the clerk glance at the man standing back of her. Mechanically she turned and walked out of the room and found herself in the courtyard before she realised what had happened.

She had failed. What would she tell Lester? What would he say to her? She could almost hear him shout hoarsely at her: "Don't you tell me you didn't see him!"

At one corner of the yard, near the entrance, she encountered some workmen, encasing some great frames of heavy glass windows. She stopped dumbly, in front of them, and caught her reflection in one of the shining surfaces. Another pang of anguish rushed through her. She saw her bright new clothes in which she had garbed herself to approach Vernon.

Then she turned hurriedly from the reminder and walked quickly through the large iron gate, her determination withering with every step.

Fortunately, a brief respite awaited her at home, for Lester was away. Sinking into a chair she sat silently for some time, glad of a chance to plan some excuse for her failure. When Lester came in and very anxiously walked up to her and said: "Well?" she answered hurriedly, "Well, I saw him, Lester, and he wants me to come back in the morning. He was awfully busy." Thoughtfully she added, as his face seemed to cloud: "Ain't that great?"

"What do you think of him?"

"Oh,"—it was hard to lie while his heavy face was studying her so. "He wasn't so bad." Then she added with a quaint toss of her gold brown head, "I didn't have so much time to talk to him, you know."

Apparently this satisfied him, although she noticed he glanced at her in a queer way, as if he would reserve his suspicions for some future time. Later, while she was preparing the supper, he called in to her:

"I had a funny time to-day, Marcy. You know the fellows are talking about striking. Well, I had a job making them see it wouldn't do no good." When she came into the room with a platter of cold meat, he said, regarding her closely: "They'd spoil everything for us, wouldn't they?"

"Sure they would," she answered, wondering what meaning was in his words.

All through the night there played in front of Marcy the people who vainly had sat waiting to see Vernon, the old bent grey figures, the girls she knew, even her own hesitating form. And early the next morning she hurriedly rose, cooked the breakfast for her sleeping husband, scribbled a note that she put on his plate at the table: "I guess I better get there before the others—Marcy," and rushed off to the factory.

There was only one thought in her head as she tore out through the door. She *must* see Vernon this time, or she would be in a fix, indeed.

The waiting room was empty. She looked around, thinking to herself that it was better to come early than to have been caught in a lie by Lester. For some minutes she sat patiently on one of the benches. Then, with the thought that the old clerk might be inside, she arose and

walked confidently to the door through which he had disappeared the day before.

Silhouetted against the light of the window was a man with his back toward her. He was stylishly dressed, tall, with broad shoulders. More as an apology for being there, Marcy said tremblingly: "Is any one here, Mister?"

The man turned toward her. "Did you want to see some one, Miss?" He had a steady, deep voice.

She faltered: "Why, I—I—just wanted to see the gentleman that waits outside." His clean, white face, so stern and serious, upset her. However, her fright was eased a great deal by the gentle smile as he looked at her, that spread over his face and came into his eyes and about his thin lips.

She saw him take out his watch. Then he said, kindly: "Well, you are a little too early—a half hour or so. I just happened to be here on my way to the train." He looked again at his watch. "You might sit in the other room and wait," he added.

Braver, now, Marcy said, "Yes, sir. I wouldn't have come so early, only——" . . . suddenly she realised that this was Mr. Vernon. No one else around the place could be so fine looking. She went on bravely, determined, unless she fall in a faint, to make the most of this opportunity. "Well, I just must see Mr. Vernon."

He came closer to her. "What do you want with him?" She saw his eyes were studying her up and down. Strangely, when she looked straight at him and began speaking she found herself saying: "I think I'll come back again. I just thought I might catch him in early," while her one thought now was to stay and talk about the job.

"What do you want to see him about?" He was looking at her steadily.

"Why, I just wanted a job," she hesitated—the first words that came to her mind.

"What can you do?"

That she must be fitted to do a certain thing was a fact that suddenly confronted her. For the moment she resented his words, which in the instant seemed to scatter all her plans. At last she plunged into the first defence that came to her, while she looked up at him in a silent appeal for mercy.

"I don't know—I couldn't tell until I see what kind of a job I get."

He gave a little comforting laugh, and then, gently took hold of her arm, saying: "All right, just wait in the next room. We'll see what we can do."

And Marcy walked out, perplexed, wondering, and yet happily conscious that what she had done was the right thing.

It was about an hour later that the old clerk called her to the desk and said that Mr. Vernon would see her in his private office. In another moment she found herself standing in front of Vernon. For some time, an interminable time to Marcy, the man looked at her. Then, with a smile, he exclaimed: "I've found I don't need to go to the city to-day and I don't usually see those seeking employment; but you—rather interested me. What is your name?"

"Oh, *you* are Mr. Vernon, aren't you?" she implored.

Again he smiled. "Yes. But that need not bother you. Sit down." He pointed to a leather cushioned seat beside the desk—"and tell me as much as you can in a minute."

Marcy found it difficult to realise that she was in the presence of the man whose name had always awed her so.

She tried to think what she must say to him. Everything in the room looked so important, the heavy gold framed pictures of churches and cathedrals, the panelled samples of art glass work, the different plans and etchings. On the desk she noticed heavy glass jars of some material marked "Silica" and right at the side of his desk a series of old drawings showing the Egyptians working in glass. Also there were two small oil paintings, one of them showing a naked woman reclining on a sofa.

But out of them came no thought that would clear the way for the little speech she must make to him. Then she heard him say again: "Now tell me your name, Miss," and she caught herself.

"Why, my name—it's Marcy—Marcy Moore, Mr. Vernon."

For a time he was very apparently studying her, looking at her so steadily that she found herself bowing her head, as if to shield herself from his glances. Then he arose from his chair, just as she was on the point of telling him that she was married to a young man—that her own name had been Neil. But he became suddenly serious again and impatient and his words "Come in to-morrow—maybe we can find something for you," shut off whatever explanation she wanted to give. However, as she walked out she felt that he was still looking at her, studying her in a way that was not unfavourable.

That night Marcy told Lester, with face alight, "I think it will be fine, Lester. I know he'll give me work the way he acted. And as soon as I get a job I'll ask him to give you work too." Without knowing the reason for it she went on to a fanciful scene, quite elaborately describing how he had selected her from all the others who were waiting.

Two days passed when a little note came saying that a small position awaited her at the factory and that if she proved satisfactory after a trial, her small salary would be raised.

Early the next morning she went to the factory office and a fat, baldheaded man took her to the mailing and filing room, immediately adjoining Vernon's office, showed her how she was to put away in their proper places, copies of all the letters that were sent out and told her she must be particular to do her task without any mistakes.

So nearly a month went by, with Marcy happy and satisfied, her only troubling thought springing from the fact that she never dared tell her employer she was married, or that her husband had been laid off and was sitting at home, in the dining-room, waiting for her to get his job back for him.

From day to day she put off this obligation, until, one evening, when the opportunity did come, she found there were many reasons why she must not tell him.

Vernon called her into the office that night, just at closing time.

"How are you getting along?" he asked, motioning her to the seat beside him. He seemed so glad to see her that she felt quite at ease.

"Oh, I'm getting along fine," she answered, taking the chair he pushed out for her.

"I was wondering about you," he went on; "wondering if you were satisfied here."

Opposite her, in a mirror that hung out from the wall from an angle, she saw the reflection of the crowd pouring out of the gateway and over running into the brick-paved street. A wish came into her mind that she could let them

know that she, Marcy Moore, was having an interview with Mr. Vernon.

As he took a cigarette and gently rolled it between his fingers, he said casually: "You like your work, then?"

"Oh, awfully much."

He noticed how nervously eager she was, how her lustrous hair hung embracingly over her ears and caught a silvery polish, from the fading daylight, on its heaviest curl.

Slowly he lit a match, looked strangely into her eyes and said, thoughtfully:

"We're not so very busy now, but the fall orders will soon make us rush again." Laughing in a friendly way he added: "That'll mean harder work for you. Will you mind?"

She cried earnestly: "Oh, I should be glad of it."

"Anyway," he went on, "maybe we will see that you get a little larger salary by then."

For a time there was silence between them which Marcy hesitated to break. However, she did feel uncomfortable with Vernon sitting so quietly looking at her. It had become quite dark now too, and somehow a picture crept into her mind of her husband standing by the window and watching for her to come in through the gate. It was indeed a relief when a scrubwoman's brushing could be heard coming down the hall.

Suddenly Vernon got up. "Why," he exclaimed, "I didn't mean to make you stay so late, Miss—Moore. I'm sorry. Do you live near here?"

He seemed so anxious about her welfare that she said, earnestly: "Oh, don't worry about me. I'm all right. I can get home in five minutes." Rising from the chair, she added: "I only live over on Third street." As if he might

not know about the little row of cottages peopled by his employees, she directed his gaze out of the window with the little finger of her left hand, while a thought smote her heart that even this was not the proper way to point out a direction.

But he did not seem to notice, only jumping up and looking at his watch. Marcy saw him hesitate, as if he were in doubt whether he should dare to venture out on the walk with her. He ended up by saying:

"Yes, you had better get home. You'll be late for your supper, won't you?" Then his nervousness seemed to be controlled, for he added, quietly enough: "I'm so sorry I kept you."

But in Marcy there was only a great smothering feeling, a desire that the power be given her to let him know how she appreciated his thought of her. And at last she managed: "Oh, I think it's been the reverse. I think I have been keeping you, instead of you—me."

Hurriedly she picked up her little frayed pocket-book and walked toward the door, a good deal surprised that he should follow her. Somehow all she wanted to do was to get away, while in her mind kept pounding a great joy that she had talked so well to him. The word *reverse* seemed just to have come out of some friendly heaven. But he followed her to the door and opened it for her. He seemed to be thinking about something until he said in a very careless fashion:

"You know—you look a little pale, Miss Moore. Don't you ever get out in the country, out in the sunlight? It would do you a lot of good."

She couldn't give him an answer right away. Nor could she say that she had little opportunity since she

must cook her husband's meals. She caught herself just in time and said: "Why, I——" the lie she was telling seemed to choke her—"I just love the country—whenever I get a chance to."

Torn between letting himself do what he wanted to do and the fear of a possible calamity by being seen, Vernon did not answer her as she expected he would. Instead she saw him walk over to the window and look up and down the street. A great thought racked him. Had he ever had this sort of opportunity for real happiness? Had any kindly fate ever before so tempted him? Within his soul, as he looked down on to the people filing out who gained their bread and butter simply because of him, a great whisper seemed to rise—a whisper that said: "You've been a fool long enough." So it was that when he came back to her side he said in a very friendly and decisive way:

"Now I tell you what I want you to do. Some Saturday afternoon—next Saturday would be a good time, you walk out on the Farm Road. Maybe I'll come along in my roadster and pick you up. Would you like a nice little ride?"

How good it was of him, she thought; then wondered if she could get back in time to cook Lester's dinner at night. Still her husband always played pool every Saturday afternoon and hardly ever came home.

As if divining the reason for her hesitation, Vernon added: "Oh, you needn't worry about getting home. I can get you back," he thought for a brief moment—"to the end of Main Street, long before six o'clock. Then you can run on home, yourself. You wouldn't mind that, would you?"

"Oh, you're so kind, Mr. Vernon. Of course I wouldn't mind."

He opened the door for her and Marcy walked out, with the wish that one of the scrubwomen, perchance, might see her come out of the President's private office.

CHAPTER XV

THE following Saturday afternoon, after an interim of breathless expectance and incredulity, Marcy tramped a good half hour through the dust of the seldom travelled Farm Road before Vernon overtook her.

"I'm sorry I made you wait so long," he said, as he stopped the car and opened the door for her to get in beside him. "I had to attend to some stupid correspondence at the office." He added, bending over her: "Only the boss has to work Saturday afternoons."

She stepped into the car proudly, yet stifled by the realisation that the great man, so fine looking in his heavy grey coat and white flannel trousers, should be taking her with him the way he would any of the people he knew.

For some time he drove very fast, without a word. Then, with his face away from her, as if he must study the road ahead, he said, apparently pleased by the idea:

"I know a little place up near Tarrytown, where we might stop and get some lemonade, or something. It's so hot and dusty." Now he turned toward her, "How would you like that?"

"Why, I think that would be fine," she answered.

"It's a nice, quiet, little place," he exclaimed a little more enthusiastically. "There are a couple of musicians there, or at least there used to be—if any one wants to dance. Do you care for dancing?"

"Oh, I love to dance. Do you dance?" she blurted on.

He smiled, answering, "No, I don't dance, you see I'm

thirty-seven—that's near forty,—but if you want to, perhaps we can find a partner for you," he added, half in earnest. As he spoke she suddenly became conscious that her dress had drawn up, baring her legs far above her shoetops. Quickly pulling down her skirt she saw too, that his attention had been attracted by her action. Rather shamedly she turned away from him, while crimson blotches stole to her cheeks.

Vernon was on the point of saying something, then caught himself and turning to the wheel, fixed his eyes on the road ahead.

A little further on they turned through a bowered gateway and stopped at the side of a newly painted frame building. One or two other automobiles were standing under a sort of shed. He helped her out, standing for a moment in a study of the other cars.

Then he said: "Let's go in," a little nervously, and led the way through a screen door, into a large room with many tables. At the farthest end sat two or three couples and Vernon gave them a sharp glance before he sat down at a table shown him by the waiter. For a moment his look of uneasiness worried her, as if he regretted their coming here. But as soon as they sat down at the table his manner changed again. He suddenly became kind and gentle, while his only explanatory word was: "You know I'd hate to run into anybody from the factory," and added: "You understand that, don't you?"

She replied assuringly, "Oh, of course I understand."

But she could not help noticing how the other couples eyed them. "You don't know any of those people, do you, Mr. Vernon?" she suddenly asked.

Vernon understood what had prompted the question. He answered casually, looking at his watch as he spoke:

"They're probably people living near here. Everybody knows every one else. It's like a big family."

But it was with some satisfaction that he saw the couple at the end of the room, turn to each other and begin in whispers their own conversations. He had visions of news spreading at the factory next day. He could even see the old clerk at his desk in the reception hall, whisper to the doorkeeper: "I hear the boss was out for a little drive."

Marcy's eyes now took in the small raised platform at the end of the room, where two coloured musicians were playing the piano and violin. It was fine to be happy like this, she thought, and when she watched Vernon give his order to the waiter saying: "A claret lemonade for the lady, a Scotch highball for me," she thought how wonderful he was and how coarse Lester would be, giving an order, with his rough words and bullying manner. She even remembered the time the boy had taken her out to a café and forced her to drink some plain whiskey. "Be a sport," he had said, and was angry with her when she hesitated. This man was so kind, so different.

When the waiter brought the drinks, Vernon murmured, apologetically, "I ordered lemonade for you. I hope that was all right," while the thought stole in his mind that if any one should ever question him, the lemonade would be a good proof of his care of her.

"Oh, I never drink anything else," she asserted.

He drank very slowly, as he watched her. Marcy was a little ashamed when she realised that she had finished her drink before he was through with his. "You can have another, if you want it," he said, noticing her embarrassment.

"Well, if I——"

"Waiter," he called, "bring us another claret lemonade," even before she could stop him.

It was such fun to be in this quiet place. Their table was in a sort of bay window and down through the trees could be seen the shining water of the Hudson. A gauzy pink shade that covered the light on the table made the place even more cozy. As she looked across to Vernon she smiled to show him how happy she was.

For a time Vernon sat in silence listening to the music with just a casual glance at her now and then, which Marcy tried to return in the same knowing manner. She could not know what pitying thought went through the man's mind for her effort at worldliness, wording to himself the phrase that always lay deep in his consciousness. "Poor things—they're all alike."

There even raced through his mind many of the spent episodes in his life, where all the glory of an assignation had been spoilt by this same willingness but lack of understanding. Even as he watched the beautiful child smiling so sweetly across at him he reflected what a pity it was that all attractive women didn't know the rule of the hunt —that a sportsman could not fire at the bird on the limb. Only the ugly women knew how to hold aloof—their only defence, perhaps.

It was after some time of this disturbing reflection that Vernon said, as much to upset the trend of his own thoughts as to interest Marcy:

"Tell me, do you wonder much about things, people, life—you know, the things that we read about in the newspapers?"

Determined that he would not find her ignorant and unprepared with a reply, she plunged into an answer.

"Oh, I guess I know a good deal, that is, for one who

hasn't travelled much." She watched his eyes for approval as she spoke.

He laughed gently and thoughtfully went on: "Tell me, what kind of a man do you think I am?"

"Why, I guess you are a man—that's used to having everything pretty nice." She continued with more conviction, "I guess you know how to make men mind you, all right."

He gently reached across the table and, as if it were a good joke, took her hand, squeezed it, and said: "Fine, just my character exactly." When he leaned back, he added: "Have you ever thought about what kind of a man is going to love you some day, and you are going to love? You know that's bound to happen to you just like it happens to every one else."

This was not so easily answered. For a moment she thought that now would be a good time to tell him that already she was—well, after all, she wasn't loved by Lester. So for the want of a better idea she entered into a description of what she thought represented a fine looking, well-dressed, successful man like Vernon. She said, "blue eyes" even, finding it hard in her veiled glance to be sure whether his eyes were blue or grey.

It made him laugh, and this time he reached across and took her hand and held it, even after he was through with his remark: "I think you're flattering me."

At the moment, the conviction shot through him that all his days of longing were at an end. In a way apparently without design, or thought, he took her fingers and gently squeezed them. Then just when it seemed as if an unspoken protest must steal into her thoughts, he took his hand away and from the little stand in the centre of the

table lifted a few matches. Burning one or two of them down to their very ends he exclaimed, rather seriously:

"That's the way some people's lives go. Just burning out, without ever making a flame that any one sees."

He seemed so sad that Marcy remarked, for no other reason than to justify his kindness to her, "I guess it don't do any good to think so seriously about things, does it?"

This period of speculation was cut short, however, when a very fat woman of middle age got up from her chair at the far end of the room and with a thin, pale-faced young fellow began to dance around the space cleared of tables.

Vernon saw the look of disgust creep into Marcy's eyes and hastened to change her thoughts, saying:

"This is a pretty nice place, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's awfully nice," though her eyes followed the ill-matched couple.

Then, a middle aged man, with a woman quite the same age, and a young girl of about her own age came wearily into the room, and sat down at a table near them. They had on dusty looking automobile coats and seemed too tired to speak to each other, though Marcy noticed how the young girl's eyes continually roamed about the room. She had blonde hair and was really pretty.

It was at this moment that Marcy saw Vernon turn, caught by the little girl's wandering glance. He said:

"A happy family out for an airing and none of them talking to each other."

"I guess they're too tired," she suggested.

He added, "Or too bored." She heard him sigh, and murmur sadly: "Life—life ——"

They were in the car and at the outskirts of Hastings in what seemed to Marcy half the time it had taken them

to go out. And when Vernon said: "Good-bye, now hurry home and take good care of yourself," adding in a very kindly voice: "know that I am thinking of you too," it seemed that instantly all of her happiness was swallowed up.

She had even composed a little speech that would tell him how wonderful it was that he should be so interested in a poor girl like her but he skipped off leaving her full of resentment, at his hurried departure.

However, until his car vanished in a cloud of dust at a turn in the road she stood loking after him, thinking how lucky she was, and how she wished she might dare defiantly to tell her husband how Mr. Vernon liked her. Never before in all her life had she ever felt so full of courage.

When she reached the little cottage and went in to the green-papered dining room and saw that it was ten minutes of six and that she must hurry with the supper, a feeling of honest indignation spread over her at the idea that she must cook for the gruff Lester, who appreciated her qualities not even half as much as did her employer.

She was really happy when, after waiting until past seven-thirty, she realised that her husband was not coming home for the evening meal. Her anger had even fuller sway when she imagined him playing pool and gambling away the money she was earning for him.

Marcy waited till eight o'clock before she went into her room and undressed slowly, for the first time putting her clothes away with care, even laying out her Sunday morning's dress and the little lace collar she wore with it. Continually in her mind were pictures of the afternoon—the way she had sat opposite Mr. Vernon and talked to him—how sad he had looked when he bent over the burnt matches.

As she jumped into bed her thoughts had an odd accompaniment.

She wished now she might have said something that would have made Mr. Vernon feel better.

CHAPTER XVI

IN the weeks that followed, Mabel found her husband growing more and more silent and meditative, while Leonard became more and more aware that she was increasingly petulant and childlike. Every day it seemed she had some new experiences which she must relate to him. It seemed to be a species of expression of her love. For the first time she began to consult him regarding personal matters, like her clothes, and fineries. And no matter how bored he was by this, she would talk to him and question him in an animated, childlike way, that made him want to run out of the house.

Sitting in his office, Leonard would grow tense with anger, as he thought over this, and saw how, without even knowing it, she was re-living for him Jennie's lover-like antics.

One day, Mabel came across an advertisement in a New York paper, relating how a certain Madame Bleu had discovered a method by which one could determine the exact perfume each temperament required. The only set back was that the wife must know her husband's preference in colours and music.

And that night as they were leaving the table, she stopped him and told him this with wide-open eyes and her face wreathed in satisfaction at her great discovery.

And when he laughed at her, she came back, her spirits drooping somewhat:

"But Leonard—I'm only doing this to please you." Ris-

ing from the table she came to his side. "Why, it might be just some such a—an intangible—that will make you love me the way you ought to."

"Oh, Mabel, don't—don't," he begged; "our lives aren't guided—by intangibles."

He felt like saying that it took something a whole lot more definite. But as always, her strange expression of agony showing through her glad face, like some veil-like shroud covering the horror underneath, kept back his words.

Restlessly, he left the table and walked to the white stone mantel-piece where he caught a reflection of himself in the slanting mirror hanging above it. For the first time in a great while he had dined wearing his dinner clothes. And in the mirror he could see how Mabel glanced at his back, admiringly. The thought came to him that she ought to realise that a good looking man like him could not be expected to throw himself away on her.

In fact, Mabel had a hard fight to keep back her desire to add just one more plea that he come back to her, at least in spirit. As he stood smoking with his arm resting on the mantel, he was indeed fine-looking. Somehow the narrow dinner coat made him look taller and broader through the shoulders. She wished that she might go up and throw her arms about him and draw him close to her. For the moment a pang of vindictive remorse actually shot through her that she had not been created more beautiful. Then he turned and she saw how tightly the broad expanse of white silk clung to his bosom. Truly he was getting more handsome than ever. And developing more in character, too. It must have been the strain of his business worries that was moulding him. At least the strength of his will was more apparent than ever. He

seemed so much more confident, more pleased with things and more at ease. She could tell by the way the muscles contracted uneasily under the flesh of his smooth skinned jaws and cheeks and by his eyes, formerly so soft and dreamy, which now were showing a new strength—unyielding, cold, yet reposeful. Suddenly she broke out:

"Oh, Leonard, why can't we be happy? Why can't you treat me decently, as you used to before we were married?" She half shut her eyes, as if to recall the past. "Oh, you don't know how noble and wonderful you were then!"

He answered with a good deal of control:

"Why, Mabel, do you think—you are giving me—all that a wife should? Maybe you are not to blame——" fully conscious that what he was saying had no meaning. He saw her look at him in a startled way. "But you know," he went on, "it is not always good intentions that even up things. Sometimes we have to bow our heads and submit to things that are inevitable, just because—well, because we are made in a certain way."

At the moment he could not help surveying her tall, thin figure, the spareness of which she even accentuated by wearing a black jet and lace dress. Also he was a little angered that she should have intruded this subject on him so inopportunely. Just at the moment his thoughts, enveloped by the soft blue smoke from his cigar, had been delving along new vistas, where a beautifully gowned little woman was waiting for him amid glowing lights and humming orchestras.

And he added with a certain bitterness, "I suppose you understand what I mean, don't you?"

"You see, Mabel," he said—there was a long cone of ashes on his cigar and he took the time to brush it into

the grate before he went on—"our angles of vision are different. You know, all women are a little insane in their hearts. But God made them just that much cleverer to keep it from going to their heads. And in your case——" there was a disparaging glance that cut her to the quick, as he ranted on, "but I'll get off the physical end of the conversation, if you want to." He ended up by exclaiming restlessly: "Oh, Mabel, why won't you just see it and give in? You know, you will always have a hard time of it, because it's your vanity to suffer anyway."

A tall waiter, sent up from New York some three weeks before, with the recommendation that he had worked in a home belonging to the "Four Hundred," now came in and interrupted them for a time by clearing away the table. When he had left in his automaton-like fashion, Mabel, with some show of relief, said anxiously:

"Leonard, you don't care for me—merely because I'm not good-looking enough." More to herself she exclaimed: "And I thought you were different from other men. I thought you were attracted by whatever spiritual beauty you might have found in me and not by this perishable physical thing." She turned away. "But I know better now, Leonard." Suddenly she broke out in a tempest which in the instant seemed to consume her entirely: "I'm beginning to *hate* men."

Seeing that he must argue out the point if for no other reason than to spend a few minutes in conversation—a brief payment to his conscience—he sought for a way that would show clearly what he meant.

"Well, you see, Mabel," he began, "I thought when I married you, that the mental and physical beings were entirely separate and independent of each other. That was the real reason for my marrying you. But I've

learned, regardless of my fight against it, that one only reveals and completes the other."

A new idea seemed to come to him as he talked, and he went on more earnestly:

"One is the breath of life to the other. It's just like the new-born babe. It has a body and all that, but breath must be put into it before there is life." As he said this, Mabel's thin lips were pressed even more tightly together, and from the way she folded a napkin back and forth, which she had picked up, he could easily see how hard she was fighting to control herself.

"You—you mean," she exclaimed distrait, when she could hold out no longer, "why, I don't understand you, Leonard!"

"Yes, I mean that you, knowing you lack—physical attractiveness, are—dwarfed by this same conviction yourself. You're enfeebled by it. You would, therefore, rather be weak and suffer, since this is more readily at your hand. Your pride is in not having any. It's like a man, only half prepared, trying to make a speech. He's afraid of his audience. That's the way it is with you, Mabel." Then he halted abruptly. He had never seen her face so ghastly pale. "Oh, I hate to talk like this to you," he cried, honestly enough.

For a time she seemed to be stunned by his remarks, and then as if conscious that she could only make the situation more unendurable she smiled a little, rang the bell and asked the waiter to bring in the black coffee and changed the subject. It relieved him a good deal to see that she was not breaking down.

For some time they talked on now, in a rather matter of fact manner. It was their first real bit of conversation for days and they rambled on to a dozen subjects each

touching perilously near to what she knew must be brought out before she left him. She must prove to him how wrong he was, to save him from himself as well as for her. And as they talked, Vernon realised as he watched her, how pathetic the situation really was. So far as her mind was concerned, she was a help to him. She made his mind active. What a pity it was that she had never attempted to attract him physically, back in those days when he had been so foolish and naïve about his life.

"It's good for me even now," he thought on. "Yet she always wants me—just like the rest."

It was a pity indeed that he could not make her see this fact. Though, even if he did, she could not change her face. Beauty was the only thing that made the mind worth while.

But Mabel was encouraged and with a sparkle in her voice that had been lost for so long, gradually worked the conversation around until she told him how he misunderstood the sort of woman who does not attempt to control herself.

"All women deal in suppression, Leonard," she said. "It's a first instinct with her. Every emotion she feels is checked down in some sort of storehouse." She added: "The lock and key of pride and convention keep them shut forever. And it's only fear—fear of being honest, fear of other people's thoughts, that makes this thing called 'convention'—and makes them heed it. Still," she thought on—"that woman gets credit for being *sensible* from just such men as you."

She continued after a moment's serious thought: "You see it's different with a man, Leonard. When he discovers some new impulse he is pleased; gives in to it and makes things easy for himself. In fact he only suffers when his

emotions are denied. When he lets his feelings rule him, most women give him credit for being only human."

"Well, things work differently for men than for women. You mustn't forget that," he pointed out.

Mabel's eyes were bright now. "Yes, you've said it!" she exclaimed cynically. "And now, because I let you know how I love you, you don't care for me any longer. You want me to fool you."

When she came closer and stood back of him, Leonard suddenly wished he could tell her how futile it was to discuss life like this. He wished that he might say to her:

"Mabel, what's the use of our talking? Nobody works out life according to reason or analysis. Let's go over to the Club and get a drink."

Yes, he would have said this—had Mabel—been Jennie.

But Mabel placed her thin hand carelessly on his arm, just for a moment, as if it were a thoughtless movement, and saw again that response was chained somewhere in his soul. So with an understanding that told her to rush on while he was listening, she said:

"You know, Leonard, while you've been away from me so much, I've had plenty of time to think. Oh, so much—about you and me—and the way we've failed. Sometimes I've thought——" she paused to reach over onto a little table for an engraved silver match box, "that we expect too much happiness from life."

She murmured on meditatively. "Ive been thinking that maybe the fault is all mine. That I expect too much."

As she talked, she searched his face for some evidence that her words were holding him. But he simply chewed

on his cigar and said, after she had been quiet for some time:

"Oh, Mabel, I'm all at sea about it." Then he thought on as he took the cigar from his mouth and looked at it, "Maybe life is just like a cigar, Mabel—it takes a mighty good cigar to make us enjoy a smoke, yet the better the cigar the worse the after taste. So if we have just a little happiness then we only have a little suffering. Maybe we're just as well off this way."

Leonard rose now and walked into the hall. In his mind was the idea that this last remark really had some truth in it.

Taking his hat and coat from the rack, he said:

"I guess I'll go over to the club, Mabel. Tell the man, will you?"

In the days that followed, Mabel was continually racked by the knowledge that she must have some power to draw away from him if she wished to hold him again.

But her love for him controlled her, even while the thought came into her mind that she could not endure being cruel or hurting him.

On one side she was conscious that love for him strangely paralysed her desire to play this game, and on the other, that if she held off from him he might not even bother about her.

CHAPTER XVII

MARCY, too, through association with Vernon, felt that she was learning a great deal about life and men in particular. Formerly she had thought all successful men strong and cruel and in a world entirely apart from her own. And now she was suddenly realising that not only were big men, like Leonard Vernon, in need of other people's companionship, but actually dependent upon it for their happiness. Losing many illusions about Vernon she became conscious that something within her gave her command over him.

On the Friday following their ride, Vernon stopped her and after seeing that she was comfortably seated in his office, said to her:

"Marcy, people don't understand. They think some of us live behind unsurmountable bulwarks. But we are just like everybody else, needing human sympathy and friends and companionship."

Touching her arm gently and quite thoughtlessly as he leaned over to her, he went on to tell her how unbearable loneliness was.

"You know, little girl," he said: "I get so lonely. And the hardest part is knowing that people don't understand this sort of thing in a man who is so busy. They don't understand as long as they themselves have somebody, anybody even, hanging around them. To them—loneliness is a fanciful notion—like living on a desert island. As long as they are safe from it they can't imagine it exists."

As he talked, Marcy noticed how his head was bowed. Also he took her hand and squeezed it as if glad he had found some one to tell his troubles to. But he talked so low and quietly she could not understand what he meant much beyond that he was sad and needed her help.

However, just as gently, she squeezed his hand in return. And with every pulse, an increased feeling of power pervaded her being.

She was only with him a little while when he got up, smiled, said: "Ah, well," and took her to the door. But from the moment she reached her home, a new era of happiness settled into her soul.

From that night on she began to see and believe that she must equip herself so as better to understand all the big things this man said to her. She must be able to help him with his moods from now on.

So she began to stand in front of the mirror at night after Lester went out, and look serious, the way she knew she must look when he spoke to her. She began reading books and magazines with little understanding of their contents, but instead, with her mind wandering to the places where Vernon must be. She was glad now, when she could sit alone, in her dim-lit green wall-papered bedroom, and think of him.

Bashful and hesitating enough, when she was in Vernon's presence, yet when away from him, she had a growing sense of strength and control over him that gave her much happiness; while her yearning mind went begging in a prayer that he was thinking of her as she thought of him.

In this way passed the days through to the end of summer.

At times she felt so close to him and so proud of his

confidences that she could hardly keep from speaking about him to every one.

Then at the beginning of Fall, Vernon became busy again and she hardly had an opportunity to see him beyond a casual glance.

At first she was hurt that he should neglect her. But one day he erased all her troubled thoughts by calling her in and telling her not to forget him; that he was planning on a little jaunt some afternoon that would make them forget their troubles.

The only events that varied the monotony of her days for so long had been her silent walks over to the Hudson to watch the big white Albany boats crawl along, or on Saturday night when she brought home her pay envelope to her husband, and was met by bitter words against her employer.

It was a few days later that Marcy chanced to look into Vernon's office through the half opened door, and saw him pacing the room, serious and quiet, as if weighed down by heavy thoughts. Just as she was passing he came to a halt and looking up saw her. When he said: "Marcy, come in for a moment," his voice seemed more than usually sad.

To make sure that he wanted her, she asked: "Oh, may I?"

"I want you to," he said earnestly, looking out at her and smiling kindly.

But as soon as she was in the room, he again started pacing the floor. She noticed how he walked into the hall for a few steps whenever he passed the half opened door.

"Marcy," he then began, "I wonder if you can understand the strange laws of life that govern us."

A bit disappointed that he should start in again on his

big words and thoughts about life, she nevertheless was on the point of begging him to say whatever he thought, when he went on, talking as if he were unaware of her presence. "A law, Marcy, that impels us to render ourselves unassailable by having control and strength and then by the same process, reduces us to a pulp of sentiment."

Marcy told herself that he was in trouble. He always was when he talked about life that way.

She murmured: "Oh, I'm sorry you are unhappy, Mr. Vernon. I wish I could do something to help you."

Then he stopped his pacing, and, with a laugh, sat down at the swinging chair by his desk, saying: "I guess you think I'm peculiar, don't you, Marcy?"

She answered: "Oh, no, I don't," all the time wondering how she could convey to him the understanding that she knew he talked this way to her only because he trusted her.

He picked up some papers from the desk: "Sit there, Marcy." He pointed to the chair at his side. "Unless you have something else to do. Maybe we can have a little talk."

Marcy watched him closely while he ran his eye down the column in front of him. His face no longer seemed so serious and thoughtful. Rather, it looked hard from the way he set his jaw. Though his eyes were kind. At last he said: "Enough, Marcy, enough," quickly folded the papers into a drawer, drew out his keys and locked it, and then asked, taking her hand and patting it:

"Well, Marcy, what do you think of a man, running a big factory like this, who lets little details disturb him?"

"I know you must have a lot to bother you," she hastened to say. "People don't know, do they?"

Apparently conscious that she had thrust herself into a partnership with him, he confided: "Well, my wife knows of our little automobile party that we took that day."

"Oh, did you tell her?"

Vernon replied: "No, not exactly. Not until after a few others did. But it doesn't worry me."

He looked into her eyes, and then at her well-developed shoulders and arms. He thought: "How well formed she is, how soft her mouth is. Just like a rose unfolding its petals. And her skin—just the right tint of olive. Her red hair makes her look like that painting by Aosti." He thought on that if he had kept up his painting, she would have been just the model, for a lot of reasons; that he must not lose her, and that like most women, the dominant call in her nature was maternal; if she could mother him, he would win her. He saw that he must call for sympathy from her.

So he looked up at her face and said: "But don't you feel sorry about me, little girl, I'm all right. I can fight them all."

"Oh, I hope that it was all right," she asserted. "I hope it didn't hurt anything here at the factory, did it?"

"Why, of course not." He laughed carelessly, bravely. Then suddenly, he leaned towards her and took both her hands in his. "Child," he said: "You do a lot for me. I like you. Do you like me?"

The thought raced through Marcy's mind that he had never before pressed her hand so strangely. Nor was he as gentle as always. She stammered out:

"Why, Mr. Vernon, ought you to talk like that to me? I'm only one of the girls."

But he seemed to ignore her protest entirely and took his key and unlocked the desk drawer, as if unconscious that he had held her hand or that she had noticed. For a moment he seemed unable to find what he wanted. Then he brought out a book with a worn greenish cover and turning to one of its pages, read aloud to her with clouded face and dull voice.

"Ye who have yearned alone
My grief can measure.
No friends are near, and flown
Are joy and pleasure . . ."

He finished with a rising inflection turned on the word "pleasure." "Do you understand that, Marcy? I guess there is just one thing that ought to be added . . . *youth, youth*, Marcy—that's why I'm talking to you, that's why I like you. You—are youth, Marcy—my lost youth."

Marcy rose from her chair; looking at his face somewhat anxiously she murmured, "I guess I'd better be going, Mr. Vernon."

He rose with her, apparently surprised that she should still be so conscious of herself. At first he even seemed unable to collect his thoughts, then went to the window and looked outside, as if to let her understand that he thought it was the gathering dusk that made her anxious to leave him.

After a bit he said:

"Yes, it's getting late. You'd better go."

. . . After that Marcy tried to put him out of her thoughts, though she suffered all the time from this self-torture. She saw and understood now that he really

liked her, and in the solitude of her dreams at night she wanted him, and thought how wonderful it would be if he should put his arms around her, or kiss her. It was this realisation that made her stay away from him; partly through fear, mostly through that vague moral sense accompanying youth that told her it was wrong to see him again.

It was a hard task, indeed, that she outlined for herself, for every thought of him drew her irresistibly; his authoritative way with the other employees, the understanding that of all the other girls, he had singled her out as a confidant.

Nor did she find any great peace at home to allay the strain of these days. Lester, unable to procure another job, was drinking now and going deeply into debt, having used up the money from the factory savings fund. He assailed her again and again for not being able to influence Vernon in his behalf.

But Vernon was never out of her mind. One night she hurried out of the factory, to avoid him, and started on her way home, only to find herself seeking a path on the hill back of the building, from where she could peer down to the very windows of his office. The days were getting shorter too, so that now it was quite dusk at closing time. Seeking a path among the trees she gazed down onto the lighted windows of his office for nearly an hour—the epitome of her entire thoughts being a sympathetic prayer that he would go home and not work so late.

How the childish heart swelled, proud of its secret. She wandered through the days, content, peaceful, then fear-ridden and anxious, sucking up, like a sponge, every word she heard dropped about him, every glance he cast at her. And at night, at rest on her pillow she went over

all the accumulated thoughts, the words, the glances, . . . and enchanted by them fell into an ecstatic slumber; while her husband dozed close by her, even in his sleep taut with patient watching, like a sentinel at his post.

This repression extended over a period of two months, and all the while a mighty spirit of affection and protective endearment grew within her being.

Entirely conscious of all this, Leonard saw that he must forbear until she came to him willingly. Often, however, he casually passed her desk just to see her bow her head in work as long as he was near. But it was trying indeed to hold off.

His experiences in New York and the weeks and months of Mabel's pathetic quarrels had indeed taught Vernon certain things. He had now the manner and bearing of one who comes into the open after a weary journey along some blind trail. He knew the expression of his face was less stern and that he was more affable with his employees.

During this time he came across an article in which it was stated that certain rare human characters possessed the virtue of radium—a virtue which enabled them to affect adjacent objects and to turn them for the moment into a quality the same as themselves. And he discovered that by smiling and appearing amiable and gay, others were affected and seemed to beam back at him with the same spiritual radiance. This he began to try at all times, with unfailing success. He became an alchemist of life, transforming with a glance, darkness into light. He really felt that he had hit on a philosophy now that would soften any moment of stress. It was a peculiar philosophy too. He reasoned that within himself, in the secret depths of his soul, was a sanctuary wherein he could keep inviolate his desires and ambitions; a confidential place where

he could store up all his impulses, where he could blush and exult and deride and sorrow, unseen and safely guarded from alien eyes.

It was only his impervious exterior that the world would know from now on, he decided, telling himself that this was the reason men succeeded, that only the weak or stupid lent themselves to sympathy or calumniation.

Only to imperially garbed *youth*—emblem of days that had seared him and then vanished, did Leonard now bow his head—*youth*, intangible, unrequited, the symbolisation of passing time, was his only fetish. The ebbing sap of love and life that swelled and receded in him, his griefs, regrets, the wild songs and their crying music leaping forth madly, he now kept encased in this sealed casket of his inner self. And he felt that no one knew. Not even the devoted Mabel, who seemed so content to grope after the dim form of his retreating love.

Then, one more thing: one must hold off—become a waiter—in life. Waiting emphasised everything—made it pleasanter—made it assume more interesting proportions. Beauty was only a product of prolonged anticipation.

And he carried this to the point where, when he became thirsty, after an hour spent by one of the furnaces in the mixing room, he sought his office and quenched his thirst by filling a tiny wine glass full of water a dozen times, rather than swallow his fill from the large goblet that stood on the oil-cloth covered stand.

So Vernon accepted Marcy's silent devotion in this new philosophical way, quietly content to await her surrender, as they must have stood by in olden times waiting to see fall the gates of the besieged Jericho. She was in his thoughts, and yet apart from them; more the emblem of

something than the thing itself. Any sense of obligation or allegiance to the girl careened easily off his conscience. But to that which she represented and brought to him—*youth*—he gave reverence and fidelity.

With this understanding he felt he could peacefully walk the pathways of the world.

Strangely this brought a queer new feeling of freedom. . . . And all this time, Marcy felt in her the building of a great duty. She knew that Vernon was so much older than she, though that made little difference. But no longer was it the case of simply being Marcy Moore, but that of a messenger brought into the world, patiently waiting to give succour to a needy one.

Then early one December morning, when the snow was so deep that Vernon was compelled to walk to the factory, Marcy met him. Silently they trudged to the red brick building, and quite as willingly she followed him into his office.

"Well, Marcy," he began, "I guess we've been fools long enough, haven't we?" She pathetically reached out and touched the sleeves of his coat and Vernon saw tears flock to her eyes.

"Yes, I guess so," she said.

He put his arm around her, and his head quite near hers, nearly whispering: "Dear little Marcy."

Suddenly she seemed unable to control her long pent up emotion. Even out of joy, as out of pain, she began to cry, tumultuously, sobbing with deep agony that shook her little body from head to foot.

Vernon put his arms around her, took her streaked, pretty face between his two hands and said, again and again: "My little darling, my sweet one."

And Marcy buried her head in his arms, valiantly try-

ing to conquer her feelings under his caressing protection.

It was some time before both sat back in their chairs, Marcy unabashed, smiling in a sweet knowing way, while he tried to return her endearing glance without betraying any trace of his thoughts.

A little later he said to her:

"Well, dear, you do care a little for me, don't you?"

She looked down at her tightly clasped hands and then gazed vacantly out of the window before she replied: "I like you—awfully much, Mr. Vernon." It seemed she could hardly word the thought in his presence. It was even unkind of him to make her say what he already must know so well.

Getting up, he walked over to her, and with the thought that now was a good time to add a little to her pity for him, braced her with his two hands on her shoulders. "Marcy, look at me." She tried to bow her head again to avert his direct gaze. "No, dear, look at me," he commanded. "I want to tell you something." She lifted her head. "Marcy—say you understand." He gazed into her eyes with the most endearing look he could muster. Only after he saw the tears forming again, did he gently force her into the chair and go back to his place behind the desk.

He then said earnestly: "Marcy, of course you cannot know how a man like me must feel. Sometimes I feel like crying out; 'God in Heaven, will I never dare to love just for fear of losing it?' " He smiled dejectedly at her as he talked, although the conviction suddenly dazed him that now, and for the first time in his whole life, he really was meaning what he was saying to a woman. Somehow, here he could dare expose himself without covering his words

with false wings—so that he might fly to a retreat when necessary.

And Marcy replied, quickly, longingly:

"Well, you won't ever lose mine."

She looked at him, awed by the mysterious way in which he spoke, but listening attentively, even in her misery, alert that he should not find her lacking in understanding. And Vernon continued, talking as much to the pen which he kept twisting between his fingers, as he did to her. Now, as if a curtain had been drawn, it seemed he must only and faithfully word what he knew to be the truth in his nature. It was as if Honesty were making a first appearance on the stage of his brain.

"Yes, it is to those unacquainted with life that life holds no perplexing problems, Marcy." He went on to argue that it was of no use trying to control feelings by rule, that temperament was a matter of personal equation. "You know," he continued, "after all these years, Marcy, I have come to see that one must not try to keep a set standard, and that we cannot shut off what we think and feel any more than we can tell ourselves when to love or hate." He added: "And another thing I've learnt—is to look at life through your own eyes, paying no attention to what other people think or say. That's the big thing to learn in life, Marcy."

Vernon talked to her as if he had given profound thought to the subject, knowing that she was not following his words. He did not even trouble to interpret their full meaning, himself. But it was interesting to watch her eyes, see her admiration for him light them—so he talked on, like a seer, a sage giving out wisdom. His bearing was like that of a Buddha from the Ganges, invested with

life—the grandiose expression of anguish in a deeply stirred soul.

Then he rose and went to the window while he talked, his arms folded, his eyes glancing outside through the frosted panes, on to the sparkling snow. However, he did not forego watching the effect of his words upon her; while Marcy sat silently regarding him, with eyes sending a message which he easily understood, eyes which said, "Oh, you talk so wonderfully. You are so good to think I understand all you say. You big, wonderful man."

There was an interruption when a knock came at the door and the whiteheaded clerk from the waiting room came in with a package of letters.

"Good-morning, Mr. Vernon," he said, his eyes turning on Marcy.

Vernon grunted out a gruff "good-morning," adding coldly: "Shut the door after you."

When the clerk went out Vernon walked over to his desk, and slowly, absentmindedly, as if his thoughts were far distant, began sorting the letters and papers the man had left. As he placed them and opened some, he talked on, in staccato fashion, punctuating his words according to the importance of each letter.

"How old are you, Marcy?" he asked, suddenly breaking a long winding comment on life.

"I'm eighteen," she replied quickly.

Gently, Vernon studied her and asked if she had much time to think.

"Oh, of course, I have," she answered. "I'm poor. Poor people have more time to think than rich people."

He looked at her steadily. "Do you think I have much time to think, Marcy?"

"Well, I think it's different with you. You aren't

happy. If you were as rich as you are and happy too, I don't think you'd want to think, much. I know you wouldn't."

Apparently desirious of getting better acquainted with her views, Vernon said:

"Marcy, rich people have to believe themselves happy, at any rate. But there must always be some real cause for happiness, just the same, some cause like love or art." He looked fondly at her, adding, "You can't buy those things with money, you know." He found himself to be arguing the matter as much for himself as for her.

Marcy thought for some little time.

"I don't think you could buy love," she pointed out. "You just have to feel that, don't you?"

The words bred out of her childish convictions came easily and sensing the mystic spark of intelligence in her wondering mind, there rose in Vernon a thought that under his tutelage, it easily could, and must burst into a glorious flame.

This thought was coupled with another; that if he would make their liaison attractive he must create its glamour by holding her back from giving in too readily.

He thought on as he looked out of the window:

"It's no fault of mine. Besides, I've not the years to play with any more!"

But he wondered why he had never before been aware of her fruitful effort to appear more womanly, her manner of holding her head erect, her quaint way of lifting her chin; he wondered why he had never marked the perfect outlines of her slender body and the way they settled into the long lines gently curving from her waist to her knee; then the depths of her limpid brown eyes, the wonderful texture of her skin.

He wondered on—unconsciously tautening the lines stretched over the abyss of his emotions.

And over that line, a tight-rope walker on the road to Destiny, he began to tread his way.

"Marcy," he began . . . the rhythmic striding towards her gained speed while the thought struck him that it was foolish to hold back any longer.

"Marcy!"

His hand reached out as he stood studying her. He looked into her staring eyes. His hand folded over her trembling fingers.

"Marcy . . ."

Her bewilderment grew apace with the tightening of his grasp. For a moment she could only look at him, transfixed, her eyes gaping wide. Then she tore loose from him, crying:

"Why, Mr. Vernon! What are you doing? What's the matter with you?"

In another moment control was blinded and he frenziedly drew the trembling girl to him, and with a mad abandon kissed her forehead, her neck, her lips. The cataclysmic proportions of his desire for her went now beyond his control. For only a moment he controlled himself, as he saw a certain terror rise to Marcy's face. Then his hands sought her arms, her shoulders, her breasts.

"I love you, little girl," he cried savagely. There was agony in his hoarse words. "I can't help it. You are so beautiful."

A wave of wild longing and desire swept over him. With eyes closed and lips compressed, suddenly he became a puppet, beyond thought, responding to the strings of some dormant impulse, some savage passion beyond his own will.

And just as all his passion and love hunger were released, just so suddenly was thrown off all the mental and physical torpor that had held Marcy pliable and unresisting. She became ablaze, vindictive with anger and resentment—youth's innate cry for freedom.

"How dare you? I hate you! I hate you!" she screamed, her eyes flashing as she tried to pull herself out of his arms.

And not until she was out in the hall and running from him did Vernon, trembling and amazed, move towards the door.

Then for a long time he stood inert, stunned, gazing at the door through which she had run from him; only after many minutes did he feebly grope his way back to the chair at his desk, and drop his head between the arms he had stretched across the paper-littered surface.

"Oh, you fool—you fool," he moaned.

CHAPTER XVIII

LESTER was just leaving the house as Marcy ran up to the porch. Immediately the boy saw that she was in a highly excited state. As she reached his side he saw, too, that she had been crying.

"Why, what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Why ain't you at the factory?"

"Oh, Lester," she cried. "Something terrible has happened."

She ran into the dining-room off the porch, with Lester close after her.

"Now, what's the matter?" he demanded.

For a time her quickened breathing seemed to smother all ability for expression, then she said:

"I—Lester, I can't go back to the factory any more."

The husband listened to her, sensing in her words something deeper than the anguish of disappointment. It was as grief brought on by an irreparable loss. He took her hand, saying: "Now, now, quiet down and tell me what's up."

When she kept on sobbing, he shook her gently. "Now, tell me what's the matter. Tell me why they fired you."

And Marcy, even in her heart-sore misery, became conscious that he would be angered only because of his selfish interest, which might carry him to the point of harming the man who had assailed her. So she held out before his blunt and rough demand for an explanation, only moaning, "Oh, everything's terrible. I can't tell you, I can't tell you."

Her husband surveyed her from head to foot derisively, and then taunted her with the words: "So you lost your job, did you? Well, I knew it would happen." His jaws set together treacherously. "You couldn't hold down a job—you ain't got sense enough."

Smitten by the injustice of his accusation, Marcy lost all sight of her idea to protect Vernon. She cried back: "I—I can hold the job all right. It's not that. It's—It's——" just in time she caught herself—"Oh, I can't tell you."

She tried to rise from the chair in which she had thrown herself and run for shelter into the green-carpeted bedroom, but he firmly took hold of her and pushed her back against the table, angrily demanding, "Now, look here, what's the matter? Out with it, quick!"

And when she said: "He—Mr. Vernon—tried to—to hold me," a wave of remorse swept through her that told her she was a coward, a traitor, to the sacred cause.

In that moment, even as the hot tears coursed down her cheeks, she saw that she must defend Vernon against the red bloated face so madly distorted. Like a flash she also saw that now would be revealed the silent lie, both to her husband and Vernon, that she had carried with her through the months. The truth about her marriage would come out. Vernon would hate her for not having told him, and her husband would attack her for the same reason.

For a time Marcy was crazed by these thoughts, and Lester saw her look about the room in a wild-eyed search as if trying to seek some intelligence that would tell her what to do in this crisis. When she realised this, it came to her that she must get to Vernon and warn him. She quickly ran out to the porch. He was after her on the instant. "Where are you going?" he called.

But she ran on and was a half block down the street before he reached her side.

When he had her by the arms he said, with a lack of anger that surprised her: "Look here, now, don't be crazy. I don't care about Vernon. I was mad just for a minute back there, but I've been thinking about it—it's all right—if he likes you. Don't you see?"

Stopping short, Marcy heard his breathless words in a maze of perplexity.

"I don't—understand," she gasped.

"I mean—I mean—I don't care, Marcy. That it's all right—you and the boss. Why, it's just what I wanted him to do. Don't you see?" He dropped his head just a little and pushed his red tie in place under the soft cotton collar, as he confessed, "Why, he'll give me a big job now, the one I've wanted. He can't refuse *you* now, see."

As they started walking down the hill and she had recovered somewhat from her bewilderment, he said to her, "Don't you see what I'm driving at?" He took her arm. "Why do you suppose I let you waste the last five months?"

"I don't know," she murmured. There was in her mind little else than the idea that now, for a time at least, Vernon was safe.

Her husband went on decisively: "Well, that's why."

Marcy walked silently at his side. There was only one thought in her mind. She must get to Vernon, quickly as possible, and say to him: "Oh, forgive me, please forgive me."

She was brought back to reality by her husband's rough hold on her arm and his remark: "Say, what's the matter with you? Why don't you answer me?"

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Why, I was saying it was all right."

Marcy searched his face in surprise. "You mean you don't care, Lester—if he—Mr. Vernon is—nice to me?" She was conscious that in this part of Hastings she and Lester were known and that she must be careful so that those behind the shutters would not know they were quarrelling.

Lester looked at her and gave a sly chuckle. "Why, you understand, don't you? Be nice to you? Why, that's what I wanted him to do all along. He knows what he's doing. He knows you are married. Now, go back and tell him you are sorry and maybe—be a little sweet to him for a while."

Marcy stared at him. It was some time before the real meaning of what he had said penetrated her confused mind. Then she burst out, feverishly gathering vindictive force as she went on, as if she were picking up the fragments of her misplaced anger with Vernon. When she saw the boy's grinning, sheepish face harden to sneering lines, she prayed for strength to hurt him.

"I know now, I see what you mean. And you are *my husband.* Why, Mr. Vernon is an angel beside you, and I like him, too. I tell you that right now. I do like him. I love him. I don't care if the whole world knows it. Nobody ever made me think before, and teach me nice things the way he has. He has been good to me—just like a father—while you—you have been trying to use me—and him."

Moore grabbed her arm, trying to hush her words while they were on the street and might be heard.

But she was not to be stopped, even losing herself in a greater hatred for his scheme. She went on, bursting into one torrent of indignation after another, speaking as

though her anger had torn off the covering from all her previous stupor and childishness.

"You devil! You thought you could use me, didn't you? Well, I hate you! You are just low and mean. That's all. You don't know anything about nice things, about how wonderful it is to be intelligent and read, and everything. All you know about is drinking and gambling. Then——" this was the hardest for her to word—"You never wanted me to be happy anyway. You know that you fought with me about a baby. And I know that's not right. Oh, I've been thinking all right, too. I know God never meant us to be like that. That's why I hate you more than anything else. You don't know how bad that made me feel. I'm not a child any more. I'm a woman. And women were meant for something."

Her husband offered no defence, just listening to her in gaping surprise. When she suddenly turned and ran from him he followed her slowly, automatically, wondering where she was going, what she really meant by all the crazy things she had said to him.

Within a minute she was a block away from him, tearing along like some wild young animal running from a hunter. And as the boy followed, his disordered mind conveyed to him the intelligence that something was being lost, that something was going from him that he could never get back.

Marcy ran all the way to her father's house, her hat in her hand, her shining hair loosened about her shoulders and hanging lustrous in the sunlight. While her husband stalked after her, like some heavy animal bent on revenge. He was angered now, mumbling as he went: "I'll teach her a lesson she won't forget."

Once he called to her, "Marcy, Marcy." And when she

did not heed him he caught up with her by an extra effort and grasped her arm. She tore loose and actually outran him after that.

Near her father's house, Marcy was a half block ahead of him, and when she reached the weather-scarred cottage she did not stop to knock at the door and call, but opened it and plunged inside.

Neil was putting on his hat and at her first glance, although she had seen him only the day before, he was hardly recognisable with his cowed and bent figure. In that moment the effect of his months of lay-off was woefully apparent. His face was yellowish grey, his eyes watery red and puffed from heavy drinking.

Marcy ran quickly to his side.

"Oh, father," she cried.

The man drew his pipe from his mouth and quickly asked: "What's up?"

That she should confront him, so troubled, did not appear to give him any pleasure. Instead, he seemed angered that his departure should be interrupted. It was only after she had fallen into a chair and buried her head in her arms on the table that he asked: "What's the matter, Marcy?"

She broke loose now. "Oh, father, I'm so unhappy."

He walked over to her side. "What's the matter? You've been all right, right along." He questioned again, just as Lester walked in through the open door, bursting out, as he entered, "What's she told you?"

Neil took off his hat and, looking at Lester and then at Marcy, angrily threw it on the table.

Neither one answered him for some time, until the boy started to explain by saying: "Why, she's just gone crazy, that's all."

Then Marcy broke in, crying out wildly: "Oh, father, he's a devil. He was trying to make Mr. Vernon like me. And then get him in trouble, so he could have a big job." Her voice choked as she went on, looking from one to the other, as she spoke: "That's what he was doing. He's just low and mean. He don't care for me. And I hate him—I do, I do."

Marcy's glance now settled on her father's face, searching his expression for an answer to her appeal. But her agony of mind was not eased. A queer look of cunning pleasure spread over his screwed-up countenance.

The old man rather leisurely sat down on a chair which he drew up beside her. Beginning slowly, as if there was pleasure in hearing the words he asked: "Did you—say that Vernon likes you?" In the instant the hatred for his employer stood out palpably. "Tell me, does he like you? Does he see you? What's he done?"

Marcy shrank back. "Father!"

He went on, "What's he done, Marcy?"

The girl rose from her chair. His manner and expression conveyed to her the message that he was not in sympathy with her, that he even shared some of the desires her husband had worded.

With a glance, Marcy's tearful eyes took in the faces of the two men. Then without another word, she turned from them and walked quickly toward the stairway that led to the garret-like chamber she had occupied before her marriage. That she must get away to her own thoughts was the only coherent property of her mind. As she closed the door after her the two men below heard a sigh as of pain—as if she had been hurt too much by them to protest.

Then Neil turned to Lester.

"Say," he said, "tell me what's happened."

The boy smiled, and told himself it would be easy to get Neil on his side. He began slowly:

"Well, Neil, you see it's like this. Me and Marcy ain't been getting along so terribly well together, though you ain't seemed to notice it. That's the reason you ain't seen us together for some time, I guess. She's an all right girl, but she's got lots to learn yet. You know me. I ain't the kind that stays around making love all the time." He added thoughtfully, "But *she's* funny that way."

He stepped carefully into further explanation. Never before had he worded his thought about Marcy. He went on as the father listened keenly to every word.

"Anyway, you remember when she got the job over at the factory? It was after you and me got laid off. Well, since that time she's sort of changed. She don't care so much for the kind of things you and me can give her. Why," he added proudly, "you know any of the other girls here would be glad to do as well as she has done. I know because I've talked to some of them about it. They've all noticed how different Marcy has acted, too. Why, she's been acting as if she was better than they are." He continued apologetically, "Of course, I am not kicking, you understand. I'm just saying it's Vernon that's been getting funny ideas into her head."

Rambling along, he talked as if he were arguing in his own mind the reason for Marcy's queer action; when Neil stopped him entirely, saying:

"Look here, boy. You told her to get in with Vernon if she could, didn't you?"

"Well," Moore drawled. "I told her to be decent to him."

"What'd you think that would do?"

The boy hesitated before he answered.

"Well, I did think if he liked her a little bit, it mightn't be so hard for me to get a big job back."

"Ain't you jealous?"

Lester pondered over an answer, wondering if he should let Neil know his actual feelings. At last, deciding that it would be wise to show he believed in Marcy, he laughed out, carelessly:

"Oh, I never thought of that. I guess I know Marcy."

Neil's face lightened. "But you see it ain't so easy to get your job, is it?"

"She hasn't worked it yet," Moore pointed out.

As he saw the look of satisfaction spread over the old man's face, the boy exclaimed, "You don't act as if you minded if I did use Marcy a little."

Neil did not answer him. Instead, he arose from the chair and heavily began pacing the floor. When he turned, Moore noticed his face was hard and set.

"Mind?—Mind?" he repeated derisively. His mouth distorted with bitterness, his lower jaw dropped. As he began talking in little more than a whisper, the boy was greatly relieved.

"Why, it's our only chance to get even with him—make him suffer. Don't you see that's the game between us poor and the rich. They take whatever they can that belongs to us. But you watch. He'll have to pay afterwards."

For a time, Lester restlessly watched the embittered man. Then, deciding it would be easier for him to think away some place by himself, he suddenly turned, and walked out of the house.

At the gate he stopped for some minutes, then struck off to an intersecting street that he knew led into a field

path along the river. As he cut his way through the virgin snow, his face became red from the fever of his thoughts and trickling lines of sweat ran down to his collar. It was not until he had gained the top of a long hill mounting like a sentinel over the river below that he was able calmly to go over the situation.

Here he stood watching the mist across the river which made a fine blue line at the opposite shore. The silvery ribbon of the Hudson glistened before his eyes like a crawling snake. But it was the peaceable whiteness of the ground all about him that affected him most. Suddenly life became important to him.

The wind was blowing. The whisper of it came through the trees with a gushing sound, like falling water. Somehow it had been a long time, he realised, since he had been aware of the wind or things like that.

"What'll I do?" he thought.

With long strides, he began walking again, passing out of the snow-covered hill tops to an open road.

And soon, determination bivouacked into his soul an infinite content.

It was simple enough. He would let Vernon have Marcy—up to a certain point. And then make a demand on him while Vernon was in an anxious state. Women were only meant to be used anyway. Hadn't Vernon gotten his start that way, when he married the boss's daughter! Didn't he use her and then throw her down! For a minute he had forgotten that.

He'd kill Vernon probably and they'd never get him for doing it. It would be Vernon who would never tramp through the snow again.

Strangely, for the first time a great jealousy was build-

ing itself in him. He saw Vernon's arm around Marcy's beautiful waist.

. . . The while Marcy lay in the attic room, her head buried in a hot pillow, her thoughts filled with pictures of Vernon and of the different times they had been together.

She wondered if God would be good to her and ever let her be happy again.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was during this period that Mabel, while searching through the library, came across a passage in a novel which penetrated into her senses like some sharp instrument but which suddenly made it easier for her to go on and endure all of Vernon's increasing neglect.

She came across these lines:

"Souls shrivel up in great extremes of pain and sorrow, and issue forth as diamond points, to engrave wondrous images on the world."

All day she was immersed in this story, a tale of two sisters, the elder of which was a creature of unhappiness, even as she was. In this fictitious person, Mabel found a real companion. The barrenness of her life was eased by knowing that there were other women who were suffering.

It was from this point that events seemed to shape themselves toward a climax, too.

Then, at night, Leonard came in, remorseful and sorrowful. Without preparing her for what was to follow, he stopped her in the library and after being there silently for a moment, said:

"Mabel, I've been thinking hard all day to-day. Now let's look at this thing in the right way. You are wrong in blaming me. Why don't you realise that we both blundered and that neither you nor I can change this strange business of life? I know my mistakes and know I can't help suffering for them. But yours is more a question of

judgment, while I have no control over mine. Your mistake is the mistake of most women. They think that they must hold certain places, certain secret recesses away from their husbands—never revealing themselves entirely. They have an idea that true intimacy is a dangerous thing; that only the glamour of the unknown keeps up love. If you remember, you were that way with me before we married." He broke off restlessly. "No, Mabel, I tell you, if any woman wants to be attractive to the man she wants she can't have more allegiance to her pride than to her feelings for him. You see she only loves herself when she's that way."

Mabel broke in on his contemplation: "Please sit down, Leonard," she said. "I do want so much to talk to you." As he hesitated she continued, "You see, you are wording exactly what I said to you the other day. You're going through the same self-dissecting process, too—that you were undergoing when we first met."

She pondered for a moment.

"Leonard, I feel that there is a part of you which makes you—how can I say it—recoil, or coil up within yourself. It is as if you were living with a second self—an enemy of yours. It even shows on you physically sometimes. I just feel as if—so often the things that you say and do, are not you—but this other person. Leonard," she looked away as she said softly, "I just want to save you from him."

But matters were helped very little by trying to argue with Leonard and to prove to him the tragedy of his treatment of her.

During the following days, she suffered terribly, though to keep this knowledge from her friends she cultivated the habit of retaining the same expression on her face at all

times—an expression that was neither gay nor sad, rather one of tense immobility with no story of her suffering in her eyes. It was only when she laughed at some trivial thing that there could be discerned the pain she was undergoing.

And she gave no hint of her troubles to either her mother or sister, Mildred, who had married and moved to Long Island. It was only to a diary, written in a small precious hand that she poured out all her heart's misery. To this little leather-covered volume she seemed content to confide without pride or reason.

The morning after her talk with Leonard while still in her dressing gown she wrote the following confession:

"I don't know why I write all this to you—I, who have never talked to any one about myself. But I think it will make little difference to you. You have already listened to so many of my confidences.

"Things seem darker than ever for me at present, I am a little afraid. When one keeps one's feelings pent up so long one becomes bitter towards the world. I believe I would rather die first. I want to believe. That's what life is anyway. Belief! Blind belief, if you will.

"I am fighting so hard. I want to be happy. I want to think of the future as being something cheerful.

"But he leaves me alone without a word and something within me keeps on crying: 'What's the use of hoping?' Who was ever really happy in this world?

"Oh, why can't a woman ever dare to let the man she loves know how faithful she is to him?

"Maybe he thinks I'm not fit for the position as his wife.

"But haven't I proved that already?

"He doesn't know and I have got to keep that from him too—that any woman can occupy the position in life she wants, the illusion of which she has the desire to produce.

"Oh, how much I want to be happy!

"The strangest part of all is that yesterday for the first time the idea suddenly came to me that there is some one else he loves.

"Now I see that the future never comes. People who are older must know that as life advances it is only a series of hopes and mishopes with something infinite pulling them toward the end.

"Can it be that no one ever wins?"

She went on in this fashion for two pages, telling how intolerable was her situation. And each complaining phrase was interlined in her consciousness with words of love for Vernon and how he needed her, how much he needed some one to watch over him.

At the end, with tears dropping from her eyes on to the page and into her hand, she put down the two lines which she had memorised with aching heart:

"We who love are those who most do suffer,
We who suffer most are those who most do love."

CHAPTER XX

A DEFINITE loneliness settled over Leonard.

And strangely, two incidents happened to him in quick succession that made his suffering more poignantly acute than ever. He was confronted by the conviction—a seed blindly sprouting in a steel husk—that compassion for himself brought recompense of little value. Also he became more aware than ever that the world was mocking him, that his lonesomeness and isolation was an arrangement made by an unrelenting fate that would never let him live in peace.

His mother, anæmic and ill for a long time, suddenly succumbed to a brief heart attack.

The telegram was brought up to him just as he was looking out of the front window, waiting for the servant to bring his hat and coat. Somehow he recognised the messenger's errand and rushed out to meet him.

Then he stood still, staring at the words while the boy, sensing the importance of his errand, waited a moment, then turned and walked out to the street.

It was some time before Leonard, holding the yellow message in front of him in dazed fashion, could go into the house.

For the first time now in his whole life, a real calamity had befallen him.

When Mabel came in anxiously and cried, "Why, Lennie, what's the matter?" he just stared at the message in

his hand. Then silently he handed the message to her and walked up the stairs to his room.

He was torn by uncomfortable heart-twisting emotions. Somehow, he had never counted on this happening to him. And he could not get away from the fact that in some way he was to blame. Walking up and down the floor he thought of the telegram with its words typed on the sickly looking yellow paper.

"Mrs. Vernon died suddenly at five-thirty-one this morning. Tried to get you on long distance."

The doctor's name was signed—"Dr. Lemon."

What an absurd name!

A doctor with a name like that ought not to be allowed to practise his profession.

His mother—how sweet and tolerant she always was—had been.

A thought shot through him into his very soul.

Why had he ever left her alone and treated her so thoughtlessly? Why hadn't he brought her from Elyria when he married Jennie? He remembered now the heart broken letters she had written him at Maxine's birth. Yes, she had wanted to come to him, and he had not even answered it for weeks. He had known so well she was sick and needing him. Yet, not once had he gone to her.

Then his own voice crashed in his ears:

"Great God! She's gone from me! I could have saved her! Great God . . ."

It was not easy for Mabel to pacify him on his return from the funeral. Nor in the days that followed. He went about like an automaton or just sat in the front room looking out at the window.

But Mabel was not really aware of how he was suffering until the evening of the third day when she came into the darkened library and saw him sitting in a rocker, quietly sobbing.

Running to his side she placed her hands on his shoulder.

"Leonard," she pleaded.

And when he looked up at her she perceived for the first time that he had really grown much greyer and that his face was furrowed by deep sad lines.

"Poor, dear boy," she murmured.

He turned his head and looked up, steadily, quizzically.

"Mabel, my mother has left me," he whispered.

The thought came to her that now he was depending on her to succour him. She started in to talk, trying to reason with him that all this had to be, that it was in the hands of a higher being and was only the beautiful adventure that came to every one sooner or later.

But he only pushed her away.

"Mabel—leave me alone awhile. I want to sit here in the dark with my thoughts."

Somehow, at the moment she felt she must save him, that now he would listen to her.

And she put her hand on his forehead and began stroking back his thick brown hair. She even accompanied it by saying, "My poor boy—my poor boy."

But he pushed her away, saying gently: "Mabel—please——"

So she turned and went out, shutting the door lightly so as not to shock him.

However, she was not far down the hall when she had to stop and hold on to the balustrade at the stairs. Though something clutched at her throat in sympathy

with him, she felt inadequate at the moment to be of any use to him, incapable of helping him in the slightest degree. And she went up the stairs into her own room with the prayer that some goodly prescience would put the right words at her lips to ease him.

All that night, Leonard sat gazing out of the window, crystallising in his mind one painful thought after another. His loneliness was indeed acute and agonising.

He saw the dawn creep up and throw a pale pink light on the trees and ground. He saw it creep away and the bright morning light come with its sunshine. And he became struck by a thought that seemed queerly true—the idea that all human beings went through the same process as a day—the faint light, then the deepened shadows when the glare becomes bright.

He went to the factory but came home at three o'clock again. And again he sat in the rocker until long past ten o'clock. Then he got up, quietly, and walked slowly across the lawn and around to the rear of the house. Somehow he wanted to get a perspective of the place wherein he dwelt in so much misery.

For a long time he stood, leaning against a tree and just gazing at the sky and stars, at the foliage overhead, at Mabel's room where her sitting figure was shadowed on the curtain.

It made him think how his mother must have sat in her room, first, in the New York apartment, and then in the house in Elyria—alone.

Standing there in the night shadows of the house, tears coursed down his cheeks, and he mumbled aloud:

"Mother, mother—forgive me! I didn't realise . . . do you hear?"

Walking around to the front of the house again he

climbed up the steps to the stone balustrade that overhung a cluster of wild rose bushes. As he looked down, the deep shadows underneath him made him feel as if he were peering into his own abysmal darkness, while from where he stood his eyes, as he lifted them, carried out over a sea of lonely shingled roofs and towering tree tops. Though he was little aware of what he saw. He could only lend himself to the heart-breaking conflict that was going on in his mind.

All this wrought a further change in the make-up of Leonard Vernon. He became a different person. Night after night he sat at the table, silently and meditatively, waiting for the meal to be over and then walking slowly into the library and reading and smoking until long past midnight.

He read book after book, French History, wild detective stories, novels of romance.

Until one day he came across the following lines which struck him forcibly, more for the remembrance that came with them than for any other reason.

Jennie, to whom he remembered reciting them more than once, returned to Hastings and to the old home on the hill, for the first time since their divorce. And, for the first time, he wondered what had happened to her and how life had treated her?

"Happy are they whom life satisfies, who can amuse themselves, and be content . . . who have not discovered, with a vast disgust—that all things are a weariness."

And over these lines he then spent most of his time and thought—reflecting how his own life had been a fair example of this—just one continual process of disillusionment.

CHAPTER XXI

THE day she ran from Lester, Marcy stayed at her father's home until near midnight, and during the entire day her father neither called to her nor came up to her.

When she walked down the steps for the first time it was dark and she nearly stumbled over his body which lay near the door.

She stooped down, rigid with fright, with an army of thoughts about suicide and murder marching through her.

Only the smell of whiskey and the heavy, stertorous breathing relieved her.

Her father was drunk.

So she stood up quickly and stepped around his prostrate form and out of the door onto the porch.

Anxious to get away from the place, she ran quickly, though weak from her day of hysterical fasting.

When she was more than a block away from the house, the thought flashed into her mind that maybe her father was not drunk but dead and that she had imagined he was breathing. So she ran back, and with a spasm of fear, entered the dining room and put her head down on her father's chest. He was breathing, heavily, and snoring from the effects of the liquor.

Relieved, she walked out into the night air for the second time, wondering what she should do, where she could go. She saw the impossibility of going to Lester again. She could never do that, she told herself. He'd taunt her now, and even beat her.

So for a second time, she walked back to her father's house. Quite fearlessly she sat down in a rocker near his snoring body and scanned the situation, for some way out. For an hour or more she sat there, until her father's returning consciousness made her aware of the utter impossibility of spending the night under the same roof.

Then she walked out into the dark street again, trudging along with little thought as to direction or what might happen to her. Although there were some ideas that racked her; where Vernon was now; had the way she had fled from him made him hate her? and other thoughts that seemed to keep him vividly before her.

Too, the thought that she might lose him forever so benumbed her that at one time she nearly ran into a picket fence.

Walking along, she recalled how he had said: "Marcy!" and kissed her for the first time.

Suppose he should never feel like doing it again.

Suddenly she found herself near the Vernon home. A little forgetful, she became enchanted by the realisation that she could gaze on the big house and know there was some one in there who might be thinking of her. It was such a wonderful looking place. The moonlight on the shadow-crested chimneys and peaks made the place look like some of the castles in Fairyland that she had seen pictured.

Looking up at the silhouetted towers and gables, she thought:

"He is sleeping up there. I wonder where? I'll bet he doesn't know how unhappy his poor little Marcy is because of him."

Then the thought that he might be talking to his wife, when *she* was so alone and suffering, hurt her indescrib-

ably. She turned and walked toward where the saloons and billiard rooms of Hasting were grouped. Somehow, thinking about Vernon forced her into this demonstration of a defence for him. She would go past the saloon where Lester was and prove his worthlessness while a good man like Mr. Vernon was at home, asleep.

Marcy went on. In one place her notice was drawn by curses and loud talking and in a mirror set at an angle inside the doorway, she caught a hasty glimpse of what seemed like her husband's face.

After that she felt satisfied. Now she could go home and just wait for morning to come. Then she would go back to the factory and tell Mr. Vernon how sorry she was for being mean to him.

When Marcy walked to the door of her cottage, she was surprised to see her husband sitting by the table, smoking his pipe.

"Well, you thought you'd come, did you?" he said, the while she tried to understand that this was not an apparition in front of her. But in a moment she got over her fright and without answering him, walked rigidly past him to the bedroom.

Without a word to him, she undressed methodically, even taking longer than usual to comb out her hair and brush it. Then she tumbled into bed mumbling a prayer for the future and her chance of seeing Vernon again.

Not until her head was deep under the covers did she venture to think about Lester. That he was not in the saloon as she had thought, made her more angry than ever.

During the following weeks Vernon did not come near her. News of his mother's death and his grief solaced her, however.

But these were days of terrible longing and sympathy for Marcy. Her only satisfaction came from feeling that he was watching and that it was simply a question of holding out, as it had been before.

Though each day of longing saddened her and made her feel a little older.

All the time she starved for just a word from him, a glance even.

Then suddenly he began paying more attention to her.

It was perhaps six weeks after his mother's death that Vernon passed her at her desk and said cheerily:

"Good-morning, Marcy."

Even though the sadness was plainly discernible on his face, it was as if a mantle of happiness had been placed around her.

Then some days later she had to go into his office for some invoice papers and he stopped her and very casually talked about a big spring order that had just come in for a parish house in Bridgeport. She was conscious, however, that there was a change in him. As he talked, he seemed to avoid any mention of their past regard for each other. It was as though they were starting to become acquainted all over again. He was so polite, as if she were some stranger. And she wished that now he would not be so kind and gentle, that he would treat her roughly as if he knew her. Nor did he break forth into any serious talk about life, or say any of the great wonderful things, the way he used to do. He was just sweeter and more kind than ever before.

It made her wish that she could say to him:

"I don't understand what's the matter, Mr. Vernon. You know how much I like you and how sorry I feel for you. Don't you see I can't stand this?"

At last, a few days later, she could no longer tolerate this treatment. She went to him and said:

"Mr. Vernon, I know you don't care for me. I knew all the time, that you were just loving your wife and just playing with me."

He smiled in somewhat his old manner:

"Come here, little Marcy."

Like some young animal who had found its lost master, she went to him.

He began: "I've had something to work out, Marcy. I really have been trying to forget you. But you win. I just can't do it. I don't love my wife. I'm only thinking of you all the time. I've felt like a lost sheep these last weeks. I tell you this honestly. My wife doesn't need me. She's a finished product. And I have got to build. I guess, little girl, that's why I want you so. You probably don't understand, but men like me are like that. We have got to create. Watch things grow under *our* hands. Mould them. Watch them reflect us. There's a good deal of the mother in men like me, Marcy. That's the reason I like you. You give me work to do. That is the reason I have come back to you. I've got to finish my job."

She looked up into his eyes.

"Oh, you wonderful, wonderful man," she said, reverently.

Impelled by that admiration begotten from sympathy, she could no longer hold back her feeling for him. "I—just love you," she cried.

She was surprised when, instead of taking her in his arms, he walked over to the window, saying:

"It's hot in here. Let's open the window."

Strangely he again avoided her after that day. And

again she was hurt, lost in the fear that her confession of love for him had weakened his desire to conquer her.

Until one evening, when she met him in the corridor outside the main office. He was carrying a satchel and had just come in.

"Going home?" he asked, as he stopped in front of her.

"I—I was," she said, trying very hard to restrain herself from showing how glad she was to see him.

"Come into the office," he said.

When he walked away and took it for granted that she would follow him, she had a desire to hold back and show him she did not give in so easily. She wanted him to come and take her by the wrists and force her to follow him. But the fear encompassed her that he might not do this. She followed meekly in his footsteps.

When they were together, he put his satchel on the desk and slowly advanced toward her.

He said, very softly and kindly: "Marcy—Marcy."

He seemed afraid to touch her and yet desirous, closing her fingers one at a time in his own.

She did not draw away. Instead, a shock of gladness went through her body. And then he put his arms around her, very slowly, holding her body in a close, quiet embrace, holding her so tight that she could not move.

"Marcy," he whispered.

She felt his hot kisses upon her face—upon her throat. The touch of his lips made her faint and hurt her, yet sent thrills through her that made her feel like crying with happiness.

He began talking again, saying many times: "Marcy, Marcy, you're so glorious," and other words kept from her understanding by the haze over her senses. She was only really conscious of the warmth of his breath and the

sweet softness of his voice. His words were like some distant rumble.

At last she managed to look at him and he kissed her again. Then she met his lips with her own. She wanted to. Even clutching him nearer to her, so that some thought would not send him away from her again.

She heard him say:

"Marcy—meet me to-night out in the road that leads past the Clemons grounds. You know the summer house there on the place where I used to live, over on Henry Street. I must see you, Marcy. Will you, Marcy, will you?"

She looked up into his eyes, reverently: "Oh, of course I will," she exclaimed.

She could penetrate the blackness now and see his face, white, drawn, with deep lines around the eyes and mouth. It made her put her hand up to his cheeks to rub the lines away. "But don't be so unhappy," she added as she saw how clouded his handsome eyes were.

Marcy was ravished with joy the entire way home. All the distress of the many weeks seemed smoothed away, leaving only a wonderful sweetness. Now she was ashamed of the antagonism she had borne against him, feeling that no matter what he did now she would understand.

Every possible fear for the future was erased.

Only thoughts of Vernon, love for him, desire for him, worship of him, reverence, filled her. The mocking law of the world that at times had made her feel poor and ashamed was now changed. Instead she owed the world a deep feeling of obligation and gratitude, felt like going home and being even kind to Lester.

At supper Marcy was gay and talkative, her husband morose and watchful.

She wanted to tell him outright that to-night she was going to be very happy. She wished he might know how her heart was throbbing.

However, her husband's sombre mood quieted her and made her more reasoning. When the meal was over she took the dishes into the kitchen, silently wondering when she could leave the house. The boy seemed to be sitting there watching her, like a soldier at his post. Strangely, he was lingering long past the time for his usual: "Guess I'll go down for a little game, Marcy."

She thought: "Supposing he suspects something and stays home."

But she pacified herself with the knowledge that there was no possible way for him to know of her meeting with Vernon. Though as she washed the dishes and dried them, he kept watching her. She tried to work faster so that he could see that she was really interested; and then slower, so that he could see that she was not hurrying. But he kept up his queer piercing gaze at her until soon her arms seemed so rebellious against the lies they were telling, she could hardly lift them.

With the thought of suggesting that it was time for him to go out, she stepped to the window, pushed the curtains back, and looking out into the darkness, managed casually, "Are you going into town, Lester?"

His eyes seemed to pierce her at her back.

When he said, "What are you anxious about it for?" she was more sure than ever that he was suspicious. It was only after a time of vain struggling for control that she replied: "I'm not anxious. I'm just tired to-night. I guess—I'll go to bed—when I'm through."

She was strangely satisfied now that this last idea had

come to her. He would soon get tired of sitting around alone.

As she talked, however, she kept glancing out through the window panes, so that he might not discover any telltale guilt hovering over her face.

Looking out through the black branches of the trees in the back yard, she saw how the wind was swinging wildly; even the bushes at the side of the house were huge black scary blots that seemed to conceal hosts of secret watchers.

It was getting colder, too. And Vernon would be tramping back and forth in the meadow lane trying to keep warm. Supposing he grew impatient and did not wait.

She must get away.

But she must be careful. There was earth under her feet now. No longer would she be lonely and unhappy. She must not lose it.

Turning from the window she blithely went into the bedroom, saying rather sleepily as she went, "Lester, if you happen to go out, turn out the light when you leave, will you?"

She wondered why he looked at her so strangely and waited so long before he answered: "Oh, all right, I'll turn out the light." Then came: "Guess I'll go into town for a little game with the boys."

But she dared not turn around to search his face for the truth, for fear of his discovering the joy on her face. So for a long time she stood in front of the bureau, vacantly gazing at a row of kodak pictures stuck to the mirror's edge. Her first deep breath was taken when she heard the door close after him. He slammed it, too, as if to let her know that he was going. Which troubled her

somewhat. He didn't usually slam it so hard. But as she ran into the dining room and discovered that he had taken his pipe and tobacco, all fear was removed from her mind.

"If he wasn't going downtown," she thought, "he wouldn't take his tobacco with him."

But she decided to wait until he had time to get away, and for five minutes by the clock sat restlessly in the chair by the table. Then she darted into the bedroom, put on her hat and long black coat, and with a hurried glance about her, rushed out through the door into the night air.

Running along the street she was so happy and carefree, she felt like crying out. Breathlessly she soon passed the long line of little cottages which marked her street and turned off into the lane that bordered the snow-covered rolling lawn of the Clemons' place. Here she could look ahead over clear ground.

But it was a little more scary here, a mixture of glooms and irradiations, lights and shadows coming at her with startling suddenness. And she went on more slowly, the way a stranger enters some dark, silent city street.

When she made out Vernon's figure, her heart pounded so violently she could hardly breathe. Drawing nearer, she saw that he was walking back and forth, his head down, his form tall and black in the shadowy, dim light.

She quickly ran toward him. And in a gush of uncontrollable love she cried as she reached him:

"Oh, I was so afraid you wouldn't wait."

He had on a heavy black overcoat, and as she ran up, instead of clasping her into his arms, he nervously turned up the broad collar and buttoned it close up to his chin. Then he said or rather whispered, with a furtive glance

around him as he spoke, "Let us walk a little away from here. I had nearly given up hope."

"Aren't you glad I came?" she breathed, surprised that he did not take her in his arms and smother her with kisses.

"Marcy, you are a wonderful child. Let's walk a little faster," he said nervously.

As he talked he took hold of her arm for the first time. He seemed much quieter than she thought he would be. They were really walking along in silence. But she was so happy. His body touched hers at every step. Just being with him like this was happiness enough, after the hour with her scowling husband.

But he seemed uneasy and kept turning and looking around again and again, and taking deep quick breaths. Also, he had dropped her arm.

It was after about five minutes of this silent tramp through the unbroken snow, that he said:

"There's a pavilion only a couple of minutes from here; let's go there. I think it will be warmer."

And not until the snow covered roof of the little latticed pavilion loomed up in front of them, did he put his arm around her and draw her closer to him. Then, under the shadows of the vine-covered pathway, he looked into her face for a moment, and silently kissed her two or three times. However, the place had that forlornness of things that are made small by darkness, and made them speak in whispers.

Suddenly, there was a rustling of the dry twigs over their heads and a chirping sparrow scurried swiftly out of its shelter.

Both were held transfixed in each other's arms with terror and then laughed at their fright. For a moment

it seemed as if the unseen hand of dusk had reached them through the black tranquillity and stillness about them.

"Marcy," he said, "that's the way thoughts about you startle me when I get so lonely."

For a long time he searched her face while she stood inanimate, her soft cheeks white in the pale light.

Looking into her eyes, he then went on, calmly:

"Marcy, why do you love me so much?"

She huddled closer to him. "I don't know. I just do. I just want to. Please hold me."

"Marcy—we can't always give way to our feelings."

Looking up into his eyes and clinging to him even more feverishly, she begged:

"Don't you want me to love you? It ain't wrong, is it?" She pulled away from him just a little. "Oh, I know it's not wrong to act the way you feel."

"Marcy," he said, "we suffer so much in life. I've been thinking a lot since this afternoon. There is something I want to tell you."

There was the crunching of steps on the snow-covered gravel, a wild curse near them, and at their ears the thunderous roar of two shots.

. . . It was Vernon who was shot, Marcy realised, when the form beside her began slipping down into the snow.

Bewildered and nearly rigid with fright, she saw his face whiten and then become ashen coloured. When he drew his hand away from where he clutched at his shoulder, it was covered with blood.

Faintly he whispered: "I'm hurt, Marcy. I knew something was going to happen. I felt it."

Hysterically she cried: "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"I must get home—without any one knowing," he whispered.

Then he drew himself to his knees and said in a hoarse voice:

"Marcy, leave me—I—I've got to get home alone. We mustn't be—found together. Somebody is sure to come up. My wife——"

"I'll never leave you," she said valiantly.

He grasped her hand and squeezed it cruelly. Suddenly he seemed angered in a way that was utterly new to her.

Hoarsely he said: "I mean it, damn it—leave me. I'll yell for help. Somebody will come. I knew I was a fool to risk it."

For a moment she was aghast at his strange anger toward her. Then his strength left him and he sunk back, helplessly, into the snow. In a moment she had her arms around him and without thinking of the impossibility of it tried to lift him.

It was at this moment that two dark figures came running through the snow.

One of them was a man of about sixty, the other a younger man, and both wore black coats with brass buttons.

Immediately the older man had come up and bent over Vernon's body, saying: "He's shot," then an instant later, "My God, it's Miss Jennie's husband. Tell them at the house, quick."

The proceedings of the next few minutes were a wild blurred nightmare to Marcy. Dazed by the suddenness of it all she saw a woman run up and heard the cries:

"Oh, my husband——" "Oh, what's happened?"

At first Marcy thought she must explain. But the words would not come. She could only stand by and see them bend over the man she loved, see them lift him to his feet, hear their anxious cries. When the woman suddenly turned to her and said, "Do you know how it happened, Miss?" Marcy could only mumble back: "I—I don't know. Somebody—shot him."

Then she saw the men lift Vernon from the ground and with their arms around him and the women following, carry him towards the large house that stood dimly outlined back of them.

They neither consulted nor noticed her.

For a few minutes Marcy followed back of them. Then the understanding conveyed by Vernon's command came to her. She had no place there. At last she turned and humbly walked down the path to the road.

Before she realised fully what had happened, she was back in her own little sitting room, staring at the figures in the red carpet.

Sitting down in a chair by the stove, she began thinking—thinking of what right they had to take him away from her, and if they would take good care of him. Suddenly, something made her stiff with fright. Supposing he was killed. What then! She would never see him again! Probably she would have to go on living with her husband. Never again would she feel the kisses of the man she loved.

Jumping up from her chair, she cried aloud:

"If he's dead then I'll kill myself. That's what I'll do. Yes, I will."

It was a full minute before she relaxed and began to walk around the room, distrait, and anxious, wondering

if she hadn't better go to him and force her way in and tell the woman, who was evidently Mr. Vernon's first wife, of her right to be near him.

It was an hour of delirium and torment, of crazed longing and agony that she spent in her small, dark room. Restless peace only came to her after her hysteria had quieted down into a sort of understanding that Vernon had not been shot fatally, that it was only a wound in the shoulder or arm, and that she must wait until morning for his sake, if not for her own, as he had begged her to do.

But even when she was eased, she still suffered from the fear that she was not suffering enough. However, she did feel a little relieved. Like some woman of mutability, she coloured her thoughts so that only soothing came, telling herself she must be wise, even clever, so that no worry should come to the man she loved. She would go to bed and in the morning casually inquire at the factory how badly he was hurt. But not until some one first told her the news. No one must know how she was suffering. No one must know that she had been there or knew anything about it. Unless, of course, some one at the Clemons' home told about it.

Then she would gladly face the world and tell how she loved the man who had been shot and how he loved her. She was a woman who loved now—not a little girl. If she were the only one concerned the whole world could know it.

Marcy was in her room and undressing before she thought about her husband or the part he might have played in the affair.

And then speculation rioted again in her mind.

It was her husband who had tried to kill Vernon! Why had she not thought of that before?

She remembered how queerly he had acted at the supper table, how reluctant he had been to leave after the meal was over. Yes, he had followed her as she left the house.

Which made her to blame for the shooting.

Reasoning like this, Marcy was suddenly confronted by a new phase in the night's happening.

Why should her husband shoot Vernon when he had begged her to be friendly with him? Wasn't that what he had wanted? Lester had told her that, the day she ran away from him.

By association of ideas, she saw now that it must really have been her father who had shot Vernon. He was the only one, after all, who hated Vernon or had threatened him.

In the instant Marcy became filled with a wrath that steeped the broken old man in calumny. Losing sight of the fact that he was her father, she only saw in him a monster who had tried to take away from her something which she would fight for to her dying breath.

In a moment she had tied a ribbon around her hair, frenziedly put on the suit and coat she had been wearing, and rushed out of the house. When she reached the shabby cottage, she was sobbing with anger and hatred, and when, through the window, she saw her father in his shirt sleeves, smoking, and gazing vacantly into the grate, she felt like taking a stone or a brick from the walk and hurling it at his head. No sooner was she within the door than she cried at him:

"You shot him, didn't you?—maybe you killed him!"

Neil had been sitting in a dozing lethargy and in the moment could not muster his senses sufficiently to grasp the meaning of Marcy's accusation.

He tried to rouse himself, but the girl could not wait,

only crying out menacingly, as she straightened her slender little body to its full height:

"I wish I was a man. I'd fix you."

"Say, what are you thinkin' about?" Neil now demanded. "Who's killed?"

"Why, you know," she answered. "Oh, how could you!"

The man seemed to realise now a little more of what the half-crazed girl was saying. He answered solemnly:

"Marcy, I don't know nothin'. I went over for supper and then came home. I've been home ever since."

But after he had forced her to tell him all about it, he shook his head knowingly, saying: "It wasn't me, Marcy." He seemed to chuckle as he added, "But I guess I know who it was, all right."

However, she could get no more out of him.

On her way home, Marcy thought over how her father had been sitting in front of the fire. He seemed to have grown older in the last few weeks. As she remembered how he had said at the door, "Maybe you'd better stay here to-night, Marcy," she felt a little sorry for him.

It was nearly the first time he had ever thought about her welfare. She might have stayed, too, had not his words recalled her obligation to the man she loved. At home, alone, she could think of Vernon and pray for him. That would not be possible in her father's house.

In this state of mind, Marcy entered her cottage again; even running the last few feet up the walk, queerly anxious to get in and shut the door after her—a barricade behind which she could think again about Vernon.

She was inside for a minute or more before she saw that a change had taken place in the room. The furniture had been moved about, one chair was upset, and like a crippled

person leaned against a leg of the table. When she walked into the kitchen she saw that the window was up and a drawer of the oilcloth-covered table opened.

Soon it came over her what had happened in her absence.

It was all too plain. Some money she furtively had been hoarding was taken from the table drawer. In its place was a bluish pistol with its barrel directed at her, looking like some horrible little animal with its beak pointing her out.

For a time she stood in front of it, too bewildered to move. The realisation that her husband had come in and taken the money only slowly filtered into her mind. And then, under the revolver she saw a piece of yellow paper, with lead pencil writing on it. Carefully she pulled it out from under the weapon and read Lester's uncertain scrawl:

"Good-bye, Marcy—if I didn't get you too, I tried to."

Marcy read this note over many times. Coupled with the fear that shot through her was a certain kind of exultation. "Oh, you common thing," she cried out, but there was some real satisfaction, too.

At least *he* was gone from her.

Then she turned and walked into the sitting room again.

Lester, white, perspiring, besotted with drink, was standing in the doorway watching her.

Her first impulse was to run back into the kitchen. But strangely she felt brave and defiant. Walking over to him she said coldly:

"What are you going to do now?"

He looked at her and pointed to the note in her hand. "Did you read that?" he asked.

"Yes, I read it."

He laughed at her with a forced effort. "Well, I just waited around to see if you'd come back—alone."

Then he laughed again.

Marcy's face reddened with anger. "I wish I *had* brought somebody with me—just to catch you," she said hotly.

He looked around before he said sharply, "Don't worry —they'll never get me."

Then he went on. "Don't you see you brought this on all yourself. Trying to play a trick on me, wasn't you? What kind of a fool do you think I am anyway?" He looked sneeringly into her face as he spoke.

Marcy interrupted him now. "Don't you come near me, Lester Moore," she cried. "You know well enough what you've done to me. You know you are the one who is to blame because I was with Mr. Vernon. You know you wanted me to be friendly with him. You even made me do it. And I am not made out of iron, or something. He's the most wonderful man in the world. And if you forced me to like him you can't blame me. Then he needed me anyway," she added resolutely.

Moore seized her wrist. His manner was much like that of a snarling dog. "Aw, hell," he said. "I know your finish, all right. Women like you have got to have some reason for getting their start. You're just another one for him. There won't be any loss if I've killed him. Men like him—out hunting for chickens like you—by God, ought to get theirs, all right."

Marcy tore loose from his grasp. With one movement she ran from him and opened the door. Her waist had

burst open and revealed her shoulders and a small rounded breast.

"You get out of here," she shouted. "You get out of here. If you don't, I'll yell for help and you'll get caught."

The boy stood still for a full minute with the evident desire of showing indifference to her threat. Then, calmly he walked out onto the porch.

"Don't get excited," he said. "Don't think I want to hang around here."

Walking very slowly down the steps, he stopped at the fence.

He was whistling, too.

Marcy saw him kick the gate open and then turn townward.

CHAPTER XXII

AT two o'clock that morning, Lester found himself in front of the factory. How he got there, he hardly knew; nor how he had determined to complete his sinister work of the night. But a desire, definite even to its details, had worked its way into his mind, gradually and surely, quite from the time he had left Marcy.

He wondered why he had not thought of it at first, or weeks before even. At least now the idea was fixed. He would set the factory on fire. Since he had to make a getaway, he might just as well "kill two birds with one stone."

Standing under the shadow of the high fence surrounding the factory, he could see the light that always burnt at night in Vernon's main office. And after only a little planning he saw how easy it would be to get up to the top floor where the chemicals and dyes were kept.

Lester waited a few minutes more, in a sort of reverie. He saw the night watchman return to his shanty after making his rounds. Then, keeping to the shadows and with his cap pulled far down over his eyes, as if to shut from his conscience the revealing rays of strong moonlight, he went into the grounds and circled back of the watchman's hut to the door of the shipping room.

This he found was open, and with a gentle shove was let into a large room filled with crates and boxes. It was all going easier than he had imagined.

One thing that had worried him all evening was the

sound of the glass falling from the window he must crack to get in.

At least now the ground was familiar and with little difficulty he tiptoed to the circular stairs and started climbing the steps which like a corkscrew ran up through the building. But at each floor the moonlight came in like a white flashlight through a narrow two-paned window. And as he walked up the steps, taking three and four at a time to avoid the creaking, he was every now and then startled by the strange shadows that followed.

When he reached the fourth floor he sat down for a moment to get his breath, lost more by the excitement than his climb. It was only a minute, however, before his eyes began their investigation. Then looking around he saw, standing in a row, like men squatting, four barrels of linseed oil. He saw that it would be easy enough to turn them over and shove in the tops so that the oil would run out on the floor, and even trickle through the cracks onto the floor below. Then he would light a piece of twisted wrapping paper which he would make so long that he could get out before there was even a flare.

More to get further balance than for any other reason, he got up and walked to the window and looked down onto the watchman's shanty. Somehow it looked smaller and more inoffensive, sitting in the snow with the moonlight covering the roof. It was more like a dog house with a chimney stuck in its top.

At least everything was quiet. So he walked back to the barrels and gently turned them over on their side, one at a time, opening the faucet of each of the first two and then pulling out heavy wooden stoppers from the sides of the others. It was with a great deal of satisfaction that

he saw the oil spread over the rough floor into three shining black pools.

Now he worked more quickly. For the first time he began to realise what he was doing.

Groping about in the dim light he came to a large roll of packing paper. Peeling open the thin wrapper, he tore off a great piece and made a long funnel of it. Some excelsior on the floor helped and this he scraped up and twisted into a cone.

For a moment Lester paused now. It would be a successful fire, he thought—and perhaps Vernon carried a lot of insurance. Strange he had not thought of this before. With the business failing, he would really be helping Vernon.

But it was too late to stop now. And maybe they'd suspect Vernon, anyway.

This thought satisfied him only for an instant, however, for he saw that Vernon would have an alibi. He was at home, shot—perhaps dead by this time.

So many thoughts assailed him that suddenly he felt himself getting lost and nervous. At last in a blind, reckless impulse, he pulled out of his pocket a box of matches and lit the paper which he had packed to within an inch of the nearest pool of oil. He must not back out now, at any rate. He had a good enough reason if he stopped to figure it out. And there wasn't time for that.

Waiting only long enough to see the fire crawl along the paper funnel towards the oil, he made his way to the stairs, and slid and fell through nearly its whole length to the first floor. Only the sharp turns stopped him again and again from a headlong plunge.

Once he thought he should wait until he heard the crackling of the flames. But there would be a blaze with this,

and the only thing to do now was to get out—quickly. Back of the factory—some three blocks—was the Irving Street Hill. He could watch from there, if he wanted to.

He reached the shipping room in safety, and in another moment was out in the cold, clear air. His first glance was at the shanty. But the door was closed and from the steady reflection of the watchman's lantern inside, he knew that the man was sleeping. Then he looked up. A red glow seemed to be reflected in some of the fourth-story windows. It made him run, without looking back until he was out of the yard and well up the street. Time and again he had to fight to keep from turning around. He did look back when about two blocks away. And then all was dark. Which was hard to understand. He had distinctly seen a glow. It must have been his imagination. Yet the oil was there and the burning paper.

Standing in the warm snow, Lester strangely felt a little satisfied, and hoped that the paper would go out before it reached the oil. He was a little remorseful, too. After all, why had he wanted to fire the building? Or kill Vernon, for that matter?

So wrapt was he in this reflection that when the flames burst through to the roof of the factory he only stared, transfixed, for a time forgetting that he had any part in it.

Then he turned quickly and began to run, blindly.

At four o'clock in the morning, he wedged himself in between two cars of a New York Central freight train rumbling west.

Strangely he had run in a circle, and was only a few blocks away from the fire, when he caught the freight.

But he had a secret pride that no one would ever know about it. He saw flames mounting into the sky, and

heard the clanging of the fire engines and the shouts of running people.

And not one of them knew that the man responsible for all this was calmly laughing as his train went away across the open country.

CHAPTER XXIII

VERNON'S first moments of thought, after the two servants had carried him into the library of his former wife's home, and placed him tenderly on a divan, were a frantic disarray of pain and bewilderment. He saw the look of anxiety on Jennie's face and heard the authoritative words which she directed at the servants.

He was only dimly conscious of her soft hands holding his own, or of the sobs that shook her as she told the doctor how they had carried him in only a few minutes after they had heard the two shots fired.

It was through a haze of mixed emotions that he perceived these things.

At least he was not dead. He could tell this because when he breathed there was pain and when he could get his thoughts down to it, he could make his head move and raise the hand of his other arm.

Then the doctor dressed his arm and he heard the remark that it was only a very slight injury of the flesh. And finally he went to sleep as the result of the hypodermic needle with just a fleeting impression before him of Jennie's sweet sympathetic face as she anxiously bent over him and helped the doctor dress his shoulder.

Vernon felt much better in the morning and though news of the fire had come to Jennie during the night, no word was carried to him.

For a time Leonard found it difficult to project into his mind what had happened. Only slowly did it ebb into

his consciousness that he had a wound in his shoulder and was now in a very soft bed. But as he looked around, he seemed to recognise the cream-enamelled furniture and the picture of "The Angelus" that Jennie had brought home one evening and proudly hung over her dressing table.

The sun was streaming in through the blinds when he saw the door open very slowly and noiselessly. Then Jennie tiptoed into the room. When she saw that he was awake she ran quickly to his side.

"Oh, Leonard, Leonard," she cried; "are you all right?"

He noticed that she was a great deal thinner than when he had last seen her. And that the dull expression had entirely disappeared from her face. Instead she seemed to be more alive, even through the tracings of unhappiness that played about her eyes.

When she took his hands and placed the cooling surface of her palms upon his forehead and said: "Leonard, it's strange we should meet again, this way, isn't it? And by what strange Providence I should have come back in time to have helped you when you needed me," he could not help feeling less guilty of his treatment of her. Though older looking, her poise, so apparently born out of suffering, had really worked for her good.

But he controlled himself from wording this thought and said: "It is all very strange, Jennie," while Jennie looked down at his face, her eyes speaking much of the old love for him.

Then her expression clouded as she exclaimed suddenly: "Leonard, we must notify—your wife."

"Yes, I guess we had better," he replied after some thought, although a certain distaste for the idea flashed through him.

In an instant the woman beside him frenziedly took hold of his fingers:

"Leonard, I know you are not happy. Tell me—are you?"

Vernon looked at her and smiled. "Jen," he said quietly, "how would you have me answer that?"

She started to say something, then with her handkerchief choked off the words at her lips. At last she turned to him again and said, as her eyes, happy with understanding, sought his own: "Let's not talk about it now. Let's wait till you're stronger." Vernon could see how happy and confident she was at the moment.

And a pang of regret filled him when he thought of how he had allowed this really pretty woman to slip from him for Mabel.

"To tell the truth," Jennie went on, "I've already 'phoned for her."

She looked away from him as if she were on the verge of breaking into some angry outburst. "It was the hardest thing I ever had to do, Leonard," she said.

Now a servant came into the room and announced: "There's a tall lady just getting out of an automobile."

Jennie jumped up quickly, nervously darting toward the window, then stopping, as if a second thought had restrained her.

"I had better go down and meet her," she said, and turning directly to Vernon, added: "It is all for your sake, Leonard, that I do it."

Then, silently, she walked out of the room, the servant following her.

As Vernon studied over the situation he reflected that the few hours they had been together had really brought a change in Jennie's expression. But his reflections were

cut short when he heard the voices of the two women in the hall outside, and something about a fire which he took for granted had to do with the shooting.

Then the door opened and Mabel, white and tearful, wrapped in a black lace coat, plunged into the room and took hold of his hand.

She cried wildly:

"Leonard, Leonard—what has happened? Who shot you?" She ran on crazily. "Oh, tell me, dear. Why didn't you let me know sooner? I didn't know what had happened to you last night. I was nearly crazy and 'phoned all over New York."

Before Vernon could answer her the tearful woman turned to Jennie, questioning again, how it had all happened.

"We heard two shots and the men ran out," Jennie answered rigidly. "I followed and down near the pavilion we saw Mr. Vernon lying prostrate in the snow. There was nobody near except a little girl, who had run up. The poor little thing was terribly frightened. Then we carried Mr. Vernon in and called Dr. Finney."

"Oh, how terrible! how terrible!" Mabel moaned as she sorrowfully looked at Vernon. "He might have died from exposure." Then she quickly turned to Jennie and recovering herself, went on in a business-like authoritative way which was so familiar, "We must get hold of the little girl and immediately have her interviewed by the police. Maybe she saw the man who did it run away." Quietly placing her hand on Vernon's arm, she asked: "Do you know who the child was, Leonard?"

Vernon hesitated before he groped at the words: "I—I—never saw her." In a fashion of painful reminiscence, he managed to shape an explanation that he had turned

over in his mind many times. "I—I had a hard day yesterday and left the office too late to come home, so had dinner at the Golf Club and then—I don't know what made me do it—I felt like walking."

Both women hung on to his words and in the expression of each was the message that he must conserve his strength and not speak.

For a time both women sat quietly regarding him, each apparently waiting for the other to begin talking again.

Suddenly, Mabel rose from her chair and in a very precise manner said: "Well, we must call the ambulance immediately to take Mr. Vernon home."

This brought Jennie to her feet protesting that Vernon dare not be moved for at least twenty-four hours. She made this claim with a glance at Vernon which was quite plain with the silent message: "You don't want to go home with *her*, do you?"

But Mabel walked over to the bed, and taking Vernon's hand said, with a glance toward Jennie: "It's very nice of you to be so kind to us—but I think it will be safe to move Leonard, since, as you say, the wound is so slight."

In a flash Jennie became defiant, crying excitedly: "I am just telling you what the doctor said." And the thought struck Vernon that Jennie had never in all the time he had been with her, displayed such fire and life. She surveyed the surprised Mabel with a vindictive glitter in her eyes, and added: "I won't allow him to be moved at least for another day."

Mabel looked at her. There was a very apparent effort to control her indignation and astonishment. "I appreciate your feelings in the matter," she said calmly enough, "however, *I* can take care of *my* husband." Rather haughtily she emphasised the "*I*" and "*my*."

Jennie came back intensely:

"You've never known how to take care of your husband. He's sick of you and you know it. You are not fitted for each other. Since I've come back, I hear it's common talk in the town how Leonard stays away from you. Why should you try to fool yourself?"

Mabel, amazed at this torrent of vindictiveness, looked at Vernon who sat upright in the bed.

"We are all together," Jennie went on. "Go ahead, ask him now, how happy he is with you. I dare you."

All of a sudden Jennie lost her passion and began to sob, quite hysterically, and with the words "You know you have ruined my life and his as well," ran from the room.

Until another door had slammed at the end of the hall Mabel stood silently at Vernon's side fighting back the anger that betrayed itself in crimson blotches on her pale, drawn cheeks.

Then she said to Vernon in anxious tones: "Leonard, what would you have said to her?"

He replied, strangely restless, the while he looked away from her sad face: "Mabel, I've got a lot to think about. I'd like to be alone to-day. You come over in the morning and we will talk."

An expression of terrible mental agony spread over Mabel's countenance; in the instant, somehow, she seemed to expect a solacing word from him. She glared at him like an insane woman. Her lower lip grew bloodless from the pressure of her teeth as she fought for control, while her flat chest tumultuously fought for breath.

Then silently, like an automaton, she too, turned and groped, rather than walked her way out of the room.

As she went out, Vernon thought he caught the murmured word: "And from my own husband, too."

At seven o'clock that evening, Vernon decided to go to a sanitarium in New York City.

There were two main reasons for this decision, the principal one being a desire to see Marcy that had so grown in proportion that he could not withstand its assault; the other was to get away from Jennie, who fought with hysterical ardour for her chance to win him back.

Begging again for his love, she threw herself at him with an abandon that made him all the more conscious of the grey hairs at her temples and the sad, ageing lines upon her face. Vernon was perplexed indeed before he made his decision. Jennie had really seemed so much younger and even more beautiful until her fight for his love showed the effect of the passing years.

It was then the thought of Marcy began tugging at the strings of his heart and mind. He saw plainly how foolish it was to waste the years of his life, just out of weakness, on a woman already of middle-age. And he told Jennie: "Jen, dear one, what's the use of all this? Everything was going along smoothly until this accident; I am really fond of you, but I don't love you. If I told you I did, or thought myself, that I did, we would both be getting fooled."

"But I want you to be happy, Leonard, that's all," she pleaded. "You love me, but you don't know it, and I am so miserable without the man I love. Why can't you see, Lennie? You will wear yourself out with this hunting and seeking of yours for—God knows what."

He replied, wondering if he should tell her the truth and amazed at the moment to find that he was not really sure what was the truth: "Certain natures are created to

match up with other certain natures, Jen," ending up by saying in a philosophical manner that what had happened had been for the best. "I'll know when I have met that nature. We cannot defy the natural laws that govern us," he added.

So, at about seven o'clock, Vernon's limousine called for him and, accompanied by the stout Dr. Finney, he rode into New York. And at a few minutes before nine he was sitting in a large barren room of the Allendale Private Sanitarium, near Central Park, peering out over the gaunt shadowing framework of a business monument being built across the street and searching in his mind for some way to get word to Marcy.

At about the same time, Jennie was sitting in her library reading a note that had come to her and that to its minutest scrawl showed a hand working under the stress of a belaboured mind. The note ran:

"You will never know what I have suffered since I left you and Leonard this morning. It is strange that we should love him so. He is such a child in many ways, and so helpless. His faults are many, and some even dangerous. Perhaps that is what has called both of us to him. At least I have always had the feeling that he was my child and that, like a mother, I must be the one for him to come home to.

"I am heartbroken now. He doesn't care for me any more and I see that he loves you, as much as it is possible to one so selfish. I knew it would come. Everything he has said lately has shown me he was thinking of you again. I've fought hard against it, too. What am I to do? Perhaps, after all, this has been a terrible mistake and I am to blame. At least, if he loves you, surely I, who love him, must not stand in his way. A mother does not willingly hurt her boy.

"It is so hard to write this to you, for my surrender is a bitter one. There have been times when we have met in the

same homes, that I have felt like coming up to you and asking your forgiveness for having taken him away from you. But I was fighting then, the way you are now, to be happy. It must be that this is my punishment.

"Take him back. Only make him happy! That is all I ask of you, for I love beyond all reason except this one. I want to know that he is smiling again. I will try to find some solace in knowing that I had a few years at least of a happiness that I was growing to believe would never come to me. Will you tell him this for me?"

In a scrawl that trailed off to where a few tears had fallen on the paper was barely decipherable—"Mabel Vernon."

And as Jennie read over the words of this woman who loved even as she loved, tears fell from her eyes onto the missive in her hand.

But when she went to the telephone after more than an hour of racking heart-ache, her pride would not let her confess the truth.

"I am glad you understand the situation," were her words to the stricken Mabel. "He is upstairs, and I'll tell him what you've done—for us."

When Jennie put the receiver on its hook, she weakly clung to the little projecting steel arms for support.

Quite to herself she moaned: "Oh, why couldn't it be true? Why did he leave me?"

CHAPTER XXIV

MARCY slept only little the night of the shooting. And that sleep was a transparent one, anxious, harassing—like the doze secured in a railway coach while travelling at top speed, through which come sensations and you can hear and feel. When she actually awoke in the morning, she found herself leaping from one wild fear to another, her thoughts so full that even the fire at the factory was not attended to, in her mind, till some hours later.

Her main fear was that she would hear that Vernon was dead. And again she thought that Lester might come back and kill her, too. This last she even prayed would happen if Vernon had actually been killed.

And all the time she kept repeating in groups of two and then for better luck, in groups of three, the phrase:

"Oh, dear Lord, spare my sweetheart, please—please—dear Lord."

Her fearful state of mind was not lifted the next morning. When she arrived at the corner of the building and found the crowds viewing the giant skeleton of the whole top floor and roof, she could hardly control herself. And as she walked in through the great iron entrance, after being told that work would go on as usual, she felt that the eyes of every one in the place were turned on her and penetrating her thoughts.

She was happy indeed when she found that no information about Vernon apparently had reached any of the

office force. Thus she reasoned that if he had been killed surely there would be some word sent.

Then Vernon did not come at noon, and word was passed around that he was ill and was unable to leave his bed.

Strangely, everybody just stood about and made no comments. She felt like running up to them and saying:

"I suppose you think he's in New York or sick. But *I* know better."

Throughout the day she endured his absence. Then hesitating, halting, as if a word aloud about her injured lover were sacrilegious, she approached an old clerk in the shipping room.

"Is there anything wrong with Mr. Vernon? He did not come in to-day, did he?"

The man answered: "We've had word that he has had a slight accident. That's all we know. He doesn't know about the fire yet."

She ventured further. "Do you know—if he was hurt badly?"

"He's been hurt. That's all we know. I guess it's nothing serious." He looked at her over his glasses.

Unconsciously she gasped: "Oh, I'm glad."

But the man did not notice, and she was happy, walking back to her desk with a picture projected in her imagination of Vernon sitting up in a chair, with his arm in a bandage and smiling.

It was the next day she received this message:

"Marcy, I'm in New York. In a private Hospital, the Allendale, on Sixty-fifth Street, just off Central Park. I want you to come in to-morrow, during the afternoon. Make some excuse at the factory, or just leave without any excuse.

Take a taxi from the Grand Central Station. I must see you. Come sure, dear Marcy.

"P. S.—Have heard about the fire. But no need to worry. Am fully insured—and other things are much more important."

It was unsigned and at the bottom of the note was scribbled the words: "Tear up as soon as you read it."

CHAPTER XXV

THE next afternoon Marcy rode in to New York. A change had taken place in her, distinct and well defined.

During the whole trip into the city she sat in her seat, thinking and recapitulating. She was going to Vernon because he had sent for her. *She* was the one he had called upon for help. These were the two principal ideas that sent vibrant messages to her heart.

Meditative and quiet, with a thrill of happiness pervading her whenever she visualised her meeting with Vernon, Marcy sat in the yellow cushioned seat of the coach, looking fixedly out of the window.

With a faint smile, pirouetting about her full lips, she gazed out at telephone poles as they shot past her window and as she watched and tried to count them, she likened each one to an obstacle brushed away in her progress toward Vernon.

On arriving in New York she had some trouble in finding a taxi, as all at the station were taken. But she went about the task of finding one with resolute mien, determined now that she had responsibilities, to manage well. Somehow, she felt that this was the burial time of her old life. She told herself that now she must act calmly and experienced, that new things would happen to her. She was a woman now, not a little girl—and the most wonderful man in the world was waiting for her.

But the city bewildered her as the taxicab jerked her through the streets. The great buildings, the long bridges

through the streets with trains rushing over them, like huge crawling black bugs; the pall shed from the dull sky onto the shining sides of the towers; one street that looked like a dark ravine—all this gave her a sinister lonely feeling, as if something would topple over her and crush her —as if she might get lost among all the people and never be able to find herself again. Three times she knocked on the window and stopped the driver, and in her quaint childish voice asked him if he was sure he was driving to the right place.

When she was shown in to Vernon, she found him propped up in bed, his left shoulder bandaged heavily, his face pale. Silently she sat down beside him while the white-gowned nurse hastily fixed his pillows, smiled and left the room.

In the hall outside came the stern voice of a nurse and the feeble words of a protesting patient. But she was alone with Vernon. It was hard to believe. It did not seem real that she, Marcy Moore, could be in this room with Vernon, her hands held by him while his face looked so happily into her own.

The wonder of it! That same day she had been washing the breakfast dishes in her little kitchen and thinking that she would never see him again.

Vernon looked at her and studied her. She tried to be brave and look back at him. But somehow, his glance was a chasm over which she could not leap. So she bowed her head, and when he said: "Marcy, little girl, you are awfully sweet to have come to me," she could only answer back: "I'm awful glad to be here, Mr. Vernon. Please don't talk like that."

He touched her hand gently. "You know why I sent for you?"

Still unable to bear up under his gaze she replied, "Because you wanted to see me, I guess."

She thought that in another moment he would put his free arm around her and draw her to him and kiss her and then she would let him know how terribly sorry she was and how she loved him.

When she heard him say bitterly, "I've learned who shot me, Marcy," she was too astounded to move.

Calmly, seriously, he said: "It was a young fellow named Moore. One of my employees. But tell me," with his fingers he lifted her chin, "this fellow wasn't a—sweetheart of yours, was he?"

She fought for some word, some untruth even, that would hold him to her.

When she failed to answer, he said, again kindly: "Answer me, Marcy."

It was then that Marcy looked up and Vernon saw that her pretty face was strangely pale, and her lips were quivering as if she were on the verge of tears. When she continued to stare at him without a word Vernon took her hand and patted it, saying, "Marcy, you must tell me, dear. Don't be frightened. I just want to know."

At last she cried: "Oh, Mr. Vernon, I can't tell you."

And now the man leaned over nearer to her. "Why, Marcy, I didn't mean to make you unhappy. I'm not blaming you. I just wanted to know. But I guess you don't need to tell me now," he added.

Vernon turned away from her and even through her tear-filled eyes, Marcy could see the set look that crept into his face. Instantly she cried out, telling herself that she must not lose him, no matter what the cost:

"Oh, please, please, don't turn away from me like that. I have been so lonely for you, I've been nearly crazy."

"Tell me about the boy," Vernon muttered, persistingly. Thinking that she might bridge over his suspicion, she replied, in nearly a whisper, "There is hardly anything to tell about—about him. I just hated him, that's all. He was so common and mean." Slowly she added, "I don't know why he wanted you to like me."

A flash stole over Vernon's face. "What do you mean, Marcy?"

"Why, he wanted us to be good friends."

"Then you knew him?"

Before she could stop, the words were out—"He was my husband."

Vernon sank back upon his pillow. Anger visibly rose within him, while a spot of scarlet appeared high on his cheeks. When he spoke to her, his voice was vibrant with passion.

"You mean to say that he was your husband and you never told me—that you are married—that you have been married all the time? Marcy," he demanded, "look at me! You mean all this?"

Marcy sat rigid and silent. As the caged animal enigmatically peers out at onlookers, she sat in her chair, looking at Vernon. She could not talk nor answer him, as if she had become rigid, frozen up within herself. It seemed unreal to have him angry with her. It was hard to believe—in the face of all the kindness she had expected to get and to give. At last, just as the tears came to her eyes, she saw that his anger was rising and she faltered, "Oh, please don't speak so hard to me."

Vernon was trembling. "But haven't you an explanation, Marcy?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me you were Moore's wife? You knew all the time I simply thought you—one of the girls."

For a considerable time he reflected over the situation.

"And so you are a wife. You've certainly made a fool of me."

Marcy reached over and hesitatingly took hold of his clenched hand and kissed it. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she murmured, while the thought came to her that she could hold back his anger by making him feel sorry for her. "I wish I could make you understand."

"Understand! Why didn't you tell me long ago?"

Feebly she answered: "I just don't know. Honestly, I just don't understand myself. I do know I was afraid to, at first, because—because I thought maybe—you wouldn't like me if you thought I was married. And I wanted you to like me so much." Resolutely she went on: "But now I feel so different. I feel older—like I could understand anything you would say to me." Tears flowed over on to her face as she cried, "Oh, please don't blame me. If you don't love me now I think I'll just kill myself."

But Vernon laughed a little and then, after a long inquisitional study of her, went on sternly:

"Marcy, I guess you'd better go. I have been a fool, a weakling. You are only an ignorant little girl." He turned painfully from her. "Yes; you had better go," he said—as if there had been just a moment of doubt in his determination.

Marcy rose from her chair and silently stood at the side of the bed, as if willing to receive further reprimand.

In the tones that a father addresses his child, Vernon said: "Oh, I don't blame you so much, child. No, not as much as I blame myself. I am sorry, little girl."

"You mean you honestly want me to go?"

"Yes, Marcy."

Realising for the first time that Vernon was actually

driving her away, that he apparently cared no longer for the love that she was so willing to give, Marcy could not keep from wording the thought that pulled at her heart.

"What were you going to do with me, then? Just because you thought I was an innocent little girl, you wanted me near you. And now when you know I'm—I've suffered—you hate me."

She walked from him now to the door, sobbing slowly, intermittently, thinking that he surely would call to her before she went out.

But he lay silently—only watching her. At the door she hesitated, waiting for his word. She was conscious only of his glances at her back. Then she went out in the hall and walked towards the elevator, while each step made her hate the pride that kept her from running back to him and throwing herself by the side of the bed, begging for his mercy. Many times before she reached the end of the hall she sobbed to herself, "Oh, he's so mean. What am I going to do?"

Curious, indeed, was her state of mind. Wanting to run from him now while anger held her, she felt he needed her more than ever; that she ought to make him understand she was older, and wiser than he was—a feeling the mother has toward the wayward son. She really felt that she ought to go back; just for his sake, if not for her own.

Then the door of the elevator opened and a woman got out whom Marcy immediately recognised.

In that moment of confrontal Marcy felt a strange sensation of guilt, as if she had stolen something and was being caught.

"What are you doing here?" Marcy heard the woman say.

She must answer bravely, she saw, even take this opportunity to assert her rights. So, very defiantly, even a little sneeringly, she said: "Why I—I came to see Mr. Vernon."

The elevator door was closing, and seeing a possible escape, she started to push past them into the half-closed door. "Wait," she said to the nurse inside, "I'm going down."

But the woman quickly grasped her by the wrist, saying authoritatively: "I want to speak to you first," and motioned to the nurse.

As soon as the door had banged shut, Jennie began, in hard, bitter tones: "Oh, don't look so frightened. You are not so innocent. We heard all about it this morning. It was your husband and he skipped from the factory. We've found out everything."

She went on passionately, ridden by temper. "What are you trying to do—you little brat? Break up homes? Isn't it enough that Mr. Vernon was nearly killed through you?"

Many words in defence rushed into Marcy's mind. Words of defiance, of self-vindication, of self-blame. At last, all she could say was, "I'm not trying to do anything. I'm terribly sorry!"

"Well, you had better stop. There's been enough of this. His wife has been as blind as a bat, too."

Suddenly Vernon's commanding voice cried from the end of the hall, "Jennie, come here," while two white-gowned nurses ran out into the corridor to see what was happening.

"Now, don't you dare come here again," Jennie thrust

at Marcy as she turned towards Vernon's room. "Do you understand?" She was quite on the point of taking Marcy's wrists to emphasise her words, when some better judgment stopped her.

Then she turned and went down the hall.

While Marcy waited for the elevator there came the fragments of bitter words from Vernon, which at least was some satisfaction. Listening strainedly, she heard the former wife plead: "You've no right to be angry with me, Leonard. Dr. Finney——" then the elevator door opened and she could hold back no longer.

All the way home the woman's harsh words echoed in Marcy's ears; while as she looked out of the car window, hot tears poured from her eyes at the very thought of not seeing Vernon again. And to the flying hills and trees she cried, again and again, "Oh, God! please won't you help me?"

Reaching home, she was still dazed and unhappy, hardly knowing what to do beyond sitting in the dining room rocking chair and rocking back and forth. She sat there until it grew very dark, until the moon came out and threw a white spot on the rug at her feet. Noises of passing trains or automobiles, whose passengers, she thought, little knew of her misery, came to her ears, but they seemed to come from a great distance, from some other world than her own. No longer did she cry. Instead, all the heartache and mind-pain seemed to have gone into her body, into her arms and legs, and held them numb and stiff, so that she could not get up or walk.

It was midnight before vague thoughts again began trickling into Marcy's senses. And then they came in a tumultuous horde, every sweet word Vernon had said, all the hopes she had built up so fantastically. It was al-

most as if they were outlined . . . like figures walking past, with drooping, grotesque heads, bowed and hanging loosely.

Gradually, as she sat thinking, a great fear encompassed her; a fear that the sides of the world were closing in on her and crushing her.

And all she could do was to sit calmly and wait.

For a moment, she thought of the revolver in the kitchen—with four queer-looking leaden things filling its chambers, and she groped her way out in the darkness and opening the table drawer, took hold of the pistol and pointed it at her breast, and only the thought that Vernon might some day want her made her put the revolver back in the drawer and return to her bedroom.

"Perhaps I'll hear from him the first thing to-morrow," she said to herself. "Then how terrible it would be if I was dead."

Possibly premonitions are an exact combination of molecules of thought, depending for their integrity upon some combination resting in another's brain. At least it was quite at this moment that the conscience-stricken Vernon, full of yearning, after a day of wearisome harangue with Jennie, and hours of soul-scanning that always ended with Marcy, reached over to his table by the bed, and with an awkward lump rising in his throat, wrote the following:

"Marcy—forgive me. Things have happened that make me see there is only one thing to do. Please forgive me and come when you get this."

At that moment, he wished he might have dared to pen her that he loved her.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT noon of the next day, Marcy was again at his bedside.

"Sit down, Marcy," he said, after the first greeting. "Let's talk this thing over." He pointed to a chair which she drew up, close to his side. Then with her hand resting in his, he began:

"My only prayer is that I can make you understand me in the right way. And that won't be easy. A whole lot of women would say I am simply bad if they knew what I am going to say to you. And a lot of men who did not understand, might condemn me. I may be wrong, but my nature is made after a certain pattern, and I don't feel sorry for myself at all. Anyway, I have dreamed about you, had before me your pretty face, your eyes, your lips, ever since yesterday—in fact ever since you walked into my office. I can't explain it to myself, Marcy. I just know that in me are certain demands on life, and that I must grant them. I owe that much allegiance to myself. Men who don't understand this fact are fools." He drew himself nearer to her, saying: "The tree of my nature was planted for me. I can only gather the fruit it bears. It's the way I am and the way I've got to be." He reached over and took her other hand, saying, "I wonder if you can understand all this, Marcy?"

When she looked down without answering, he went on: "Marcy, that was my first wife who was here just after you left, yesterday. She wanted me to come back, wants

to make me happy again, she says. You see, she wouldn't understand if I told her that I, myself, have nothing to do with the management of my happiness. You see, Marcy," he confessed on, "I know I might suffer for wanting you the way I do, but it is not in my province to change my yearning and desires."

"What about your present wife?" asked Marcy.

"There is the very thing I want to tell you about. My wife and I are very unhappy. In fact, there has never been a moment that I have known the slightest thrill when I was with her. It's the old problem about marriage. The very happiness that you try to get by marriage is shut off by making it legal. The wedding ring is the iron prison of love. And love can't be imprisoned. These are queer ideas, I suppose," he went on, "but there's a change taken place in me. I see what fools people are to imagine that there is only one institution in life—and that it is big enough to hold everybody. I've been under its roof, Marcy, and now I am going to get out. After all I have only got a few years left that mean anything."

Marcy faltered, "Oh, please don't talk like that, Mr. Vernon."

"We've got to look things in the face, Marcy."

He hesitated for a moment and then said slowly, and with determination: "Marcy, you have been with me for a year now, haven't you?"

She replied: "Yes; I think it is about a year."

"And in that time a great big idea has been growing up with us, hasn't it?"

When she failed to answer, he said: "You must think about what I am saying, Marcy." Then he continued slowly, his voice lowered to nearly a whisper; as if he were afraid to give the words full strength:

"You know you are built a certain way, Marcy—you are slender and frail and not made for real hardship." He glanced at her bosom which was moving uneasily. "I have watched a lot of girls and women, and I believe I know their natures. You are like some flower, soft and delicate and tender, that in the springtime is very beautiful. That's like you when you are young, as you are now. But when summer comes—when you get older, Marcy, like that flower, you must be pretty well taken care of or you will die.

"Don't you see? Here you are, plodding away with a lot of girls who are different from you, whose natures have been made to have a coarse life. Yet you are exposed to the same things that they are. Don't you feel it, sometimes?"

He watched the effect of his words.

Still she did not answer.

"Oh, I know what you will think of me," he went on, "but I can't help it. At least, I've got one religion and that is, that no one should suffer through any fault of mine. No one ever has, Marcy, and you will not be the first. Anyway, look at the fix you are in now——"

"Please, let's not talk about that," she interrupted.

And for the first time Vernon lost his stern, argumentative manner. He saw that with one leap he could not change her nature with its rigid middle-class morals. He must take time, and since it was so important to him, there must not be one false step. So he said, as he gently put his fingers over her hand: "I'm sorry, Marcy, to talk all this stuff to you."

So there was nothing definite accomplished by their talk that day. In the two hours which Marcy spent with him, she had said hardly a word. And she went back to her

lonely home that night, washed the dishes from a hastily prepared meal of cornflakes and coffee, and tumbled into bed, dulled and stupefied by the perplexing array of events that confronted her.

The next day it was decided, partly through the influence of her father, that Marcy live with an aunt, whose cottage was only a block from the factory. She could not understand why her father wanted this rather than have her come to live with him. The thought came to her that he did not want her around him, where his now almost continuous drinking might be interfered with.

The following days were spent with only one thought filling her mind. She was awaiting Vernon's return to the factory. Nothing else counted, not even the patronising courtesy given her by the other employees, or by the blonde-headed foreman of her department. She did not even stop to think it strange that no excuse for her absence should be asked of her. That every one was acquainted suddenly with her friendship to her employer, mattered little. In fact, the knowledge that they should know of her intimacy with Vernon, pleased her immeasurably.

The only thing that did bother her was that her father was drinking more heavily than ever. A few hundred dollars that for years had been kept safely in the Hastings' Bank of Savings was drawn on and the broken man seemed determined to fill his bloated frame with liquor. He seemed to be a victim of life's emptiness—as there was no other reason nor was there the intelligence necessary to a plan of self-destruction. He was one who somehow must needs go into disintegration at the end, just as there are others who are destined to rise and succeed without particular effort.

It was at the end of Vernon's fortnight of absence that Marcy became aware that her father was on a death-dealing spree. And nothing she could do would stop him. From one bar to the other he wandered, feebly, unsteadily, his mouth quivering, his eyes red and watery. At one saloon he was allowed to sit behind a table and drink. And this corner he then sought out every day and tried to gather around him a few of the hangers-on. To these he related stories about Vernon—all the hate of his useless life seemed to have centred on his prosperous employer.

The day before he died he filled his flabby, loose body with glass after glass of whiskey, and laughed and hiccoughed his way to the very end of him. In nearly his last breath, he mumbled how he had evened up with his boss.

They found him dead in the corner in Ryan's saloon. The young doctor who tried to arouse him, in a wise, authoritative manner, which would show the magic of his genius, announced to the bystanders, after his very evident failure, that the poor man had died from a suffocation brought on indirectly by heart collapse. Evidently having learned from some previous case that a doctor must not commit himself too freely, he suggested under his voice that perhaps the death had been induced by a little too much liquor. That the light of Neil's feeble mind had simply flickered out, he did not understand.

Then they put the corpse into a cheap black coffin and a rickety hearse and six carriages took the body to the cemetery, followed by a few straggling members of a fraternal society. Some one had bought a wreath of laurels —it was said the bartender at Ryan's had made the purchase, and it lay dejectedly on the coffin as it was carried from the church, like a crenated snake coiled on the bier of its master.

And even as Marcy stood at the open grave, by the side of her aunt, the while the black casket was being lowered into the yawning hole, her thoughts were of Vernon, and a feeling of protection and assurance of her future unchanged by this sudden bereavement.

When her aunt came and stood by her side as she looked down into the grave, Marcy felt no guilt in the thought that the woman misunderstood her silence; as the band of the fraternal organisation played a low, measured melody, and her aunt, with shining eyes, looked up at her and called out once or twice, "John! John!" she felt as if her lack of communion with the grieving woman deserved no censure. All of her allegiance must be given to the man walking about his room in a hospital in New York City.

In the walk from the cemetery, Marcy's thoughts invariably reverted back to Vernon and what might happen to her, had she not refuge in his love.

. . . Vernon came back on the following Monday and they had another talk, rather casual, followed by one the next day, which ended in her gradual understanding of things in Vernon's way.

Of course he could not marry her. He was back home now, and he told her his wife, Mabel, seemed more in love with him than ever, and more desirous of making him happy. She had not even reproached him for his utter neglect of her when he left Hastings to go to the sanatorium.

But Marcy could have a wonderful motor car and live in New York, and have attractive clothes, and have people notice her and envy her. Also, she could go to the theatres and learn about the big things of life.

Marcy thought much about these new possibilities. It

seemed now that the greatest crime to herself was to keep on being just Marcy Moore.

What gave her the most pleasure was the thought that she might wait a lifetime, and work from morning to night, and not gain as much as she could now by simply saying one word to the man she loved. "Just think of it," she would repeat to herself, "All I have to say is 'yes' . . . 'yes.'"

The night after her second talk with Vernon she could not help dancing crazily about her bedroom, parading gaily in front of a mirror, in the manner she would assume when she had on all the fine clothes.

For the first time, she began thinking of Vernon in a personal way, thinking of how good-looking he was, how wonderful it would be to stroke his soft hair and know that she alone had this privilege.

It was the next night that she said to her aunt:

"Auntie, I've got a better job. Mr. Vernon has opened an office in New York, where he will have to spend a lot of his time. He wants me to be there."

"Do you know what you are saying?" came from the aunt's thin white lips.

Marcy looked at the haggard, toil-driven face of the woman. She felt more than ever the conviction that hers was the right course to pursue. But it took some bravery for her to say: "Well, I've thought about it for a long time. I am tired of living here, anyway. There's nobody here that I would want to marry again. So it won't make much difference if I go amongst strangers."

The woman looked at her and said queerly: "Marcy, Marcy, this is terrible!"

For a few days, her aunt's attitude filled Marcy with indecision, and she spent many agonising hours telling

herself that as long as she lived, she must stay by this poor woman who seemed to love her so.

And then, as she sat thinking in this manner, a motor car would rumble past the house, and her thoughts would be scattered like a fine powder in the wind. *She* could have a motor car, even have sit beside her the man she loved.

It was a sort of anæsthesia of love that hung over her, the influence of which took away all control of her thoughts.

Sitting and thinking, she would say to herself, in the more calculating moments, "Yes; that's got to be my life —I love him and he loves me. What else counts?"

Through the days, the decision that she must always stay with her aunt and take care of the grey-haired, sad woman, became less and less a force to be overcome.

Until one evening when there came a note from Vernon. He slipped it to her quite casually, under a pile of letters.

"I wonder, little darling, if ever you went through the pangs of loneliness that are assailing me. Oh, if you could know how I want you. I am growing utterly miserable and utterly reckless. I am getting so I don't care what happens. I haven't seen my wife to talk to her for days. Last night I went to my room and felt that I had no right there any longer. You see what you have done to me. I could hardly turn on the switch-button—just wanted the darkness so I could think about my little girl,—think what my life has come to. You have made this old man want to be young again—just for a little. I stood in front of it ten minutes thinking. My little sweetheart, I don't dare write what I feel. You know how I think about you. You had better say 'yes' to the matter we talked over the other day and we will attend to it immediately."

It was unsigned, as usual, but at the bottom was the familiar "Tear this up as soon as you read it."

Marcy read it through many, many times, and then with only one thought in her head, impelled by a force that she did not try to stop or question, she put on her hat and coat and went out into the night.

She fairly ran to a telephone booth in a drugstore a few blocks down the street. When she heard Vernon's voice she could hardly talk:

"I'll come—yes—yes. I'll see you to-morrow. Take good care of yourself," she cried at the black mouthpiece.

Then she went back to the house and into her aunt's room and said, in a very tired and sleepy manner, as if it were of little concern:

"Auntie, I'm planning to go into the city in a few days —if you want somebody to have my room."

. . . The next morning Vernon told Mabel in a few words that he had opened a New York office of his own and would have to spend a good deal of time there. "I'll try to get here as often as I can," he said; "but if I don't come for a week or so, don't you worry. You can have all the money you want to run the place. I'll have to come out to the factory here a good deal of the time, anyway, and I can run over and say 'Hello.' But if you don't see me, don't worry."

Mabel did not answer him but just stared at him in a manner that puzzled him all the way to his office. She showed a strange lack of excitement, of interest even, in what he said. It was almost as if she had not heard him.

But peace filled him the whole day. At last he was managing his life so that some real happiness could come from it. Somehow, he was free for the first time, and he would make Marcy beautiful and she would make him

young again. Yes, he was truly happy—happier than he had ever been in his life. He was in love——

How strange were the workings of destiny, he thought over and over. All day his fancies ran on in this manner like some smoothly flowing river. And when he rode home from the factory there settled in his being a content and elation greater than he had ever known. He saw that if it all worked out well he could actually afford an hour or two of hypocrisy with Mabel. "It would make the poor old girl feel better—and won't hurt me," he told himself.

He stole into the silent house, without being discovered, like some guilty school boy, who had committed an indiscretion. He resolved to be sweeter to Mabel, perhaps have dinner with her.

As he went up the softly carpeted stairway to break the news to her, he visualised just how she would listen to his words, then look up into his face and say tearfully, yearningly: "I knew you would see things sensibly and come back to me, Leonard."

. . . Mabel lay on the floor by her bed.

A sharp, sickening odour filled the room.

Her thin face was pulled out of shape and smeared and bloated about the cheeks. Her lips were charred white and swollen wide apart. Her body was twisted and bent.

On the floor beside her lay a bottle with a red label on it marked "POISON."

Leonard picked it up and threw it out of the window.

Then he sat down in a chair and mopped the cold sweat that bathed his forehead.

For the first time he noticed that she had on the only attractive gown she possessed—a rich grey satin, trimmed with lace.

CHAPTER XXVII

MABEL'S death, the result of mistaking a medicine—as the Hastings' papers had it from the Coroner—put a stop to Leonard's plans for more than a month.

Then he became determined again, began going in to New York every day and in two weeks had furnished for Marcy a small apartment with a maid and a telephone, on a quiet street that led directly into Riverside Drive.

The first time that he must visit her came soon. At noon he had Marcy come in on the train and his chauffeur met her and drove her to the place.

And her vigil started not over an hour later. Caressed by the warm glow of the shaded lights and the soft strangeness of a silk gown, quite the first piece of clothing she had ever owned made of silk, Marcy sat waiting for him like a dressed-up beautiful doll.

As she sat looking out of the broad front window on to the innumerable cars that flashed by, which shot past like a procession of giant fireflies, she thought of a mocking contrast; her mother, whom she barely remembered, her drunken father, Lester, her aunt, herself even in the fifth grade of the school, and then again, as she was that day she walked into Vernon's office.

She went on thinking in this strain till the bell rang, and she knew it was Vernon. Then she flew to meet him, happy, embarrassed, bashful, pulsating all over.

With her arms around him she brought him into the little sitting-room, with its grey carpet and orange silk

hangings, looked at him with her eyes wide for a long time, then gave a little exultant scream and huddled in to him and kissed him many times, on his lips, his chin, his forehead, his nose, his eyes.

Vernon looked happy and well, even gay in a new brown suit. But he, too, was excited and said, as they sat down together on the silk-cushioned divan, "Well, Marcy! So—at last! at last!"

For a time, it seemed nearly beyond endurance to Marcy, he sat looking at her, studying her and ruminating over her. At last he gave a long happy sigh and, pointing to the talking machine that stood in a corner, said:

"Marcy—play something for me."

Happy to do whatever he bid, she jumped up and took out the first record her hands touched, a gay dance that the Russian ballet had brought over to the Metropolitan, and placed it on the green-cushioned disk of the machine.

"Do you know what that is, Marcy?" he asked, as the brilliant notes, like clear crystals, floated into the room.

"It's lovely, isn't it?" she answered.

He caught its penetrating rhythm, was even lost in it for a moment. Then he looked at Marcy again.

"It's the Scheherazade."

His eyes rested on Marcy as he spoke, while she stood waiting so patiently by the side of the music box.

At last it ended. The dying notes were lost in a sea of human emotion. As he watched her, Marcy turned, obedient to his glance, and came to him, while her supple body, down to her very silk-clad feet, was a picture of inexhaustible loveliness.

Leonard held out his arms to her, unmindful of the scraping of the disappointed needle, and when she reached

him, let his fingers gently caress the warm softness of her neck and throat.

"Marcy," he breathed, looking deep into her eyes.

He could almost feel her poor thralled flesh weaken and beg to dedicate itself . . .

That night, they visited a great Broadway restaurant and after dinner he whispered to her:

"Marcy, I never really knew how wonderful you are. Look at the way everybody watches you!"

Her response was to look into his face and murmur, lovingly,

"Oh, I only hope you will always think so."

"I always shall," he answered.

Then the music of the orchestra filled the air of the restaurant, and its wistful, appealing tune caught at her heart, whose very tendrils responded and in turn sent out to the man in front of her a message of complete love and endearment.

"Oh, isn't that wonderful music!" she cried, looking questioningly at him. "What is it?" Her eyes sought him inquisitively and he could hardly control the impulse he had of getting up and kissing her velvety lips. However, he thought a moment, seriously, at last saying:

"Something—McCormack sings, I think. It certainly makes one happy, doesn't it?"

Exultation, replete with the golden prophecy he had made for himself, filled him.

Marcy answered quickly. "I should say it does." Her enthusiasm matched up with his.

Then, as if to offer a bounty to his goodness, Marcy took a searching glance around and bent over the table.

Reaching for his hand, she took hold of it and kissed it, almost reverently.

Hers was satisfaction enough when she heard him murmur lovingly, "My little sweetheart!"

Then he became even more fervent. "Marcy, darling, I'm a happy man to-night."

He looked deeply into her eyes. "Marcy, you do love me as I love you, don't you?"

Longingly and lovingly, she glanced back at him. Her head was bent low while with one movement she stretched her hands across the table to him.

"I love you—just terribly," she breathed.

Leonard looked steadily at her. Never before had she seemed so exquisite. And it was no chimera. The beautiful, soft arms would soon be round his neck, the delicately curved lips, close to his own. He could not help thinking how lucky he was. Over and over in his mind, ran the thought:

"How wonderful I'll make her! How I'll be envied!"

Then he called the waiter. "Waiter, waiter—another bottle—the same," while Marcy, noticing how he hated to take even a moment from her, felt like putting her arms around him and saying: "You're my boy, aren't you, Mr. Vernon?"

Strangely at that moment, he leaned over and took hold of her hands.

"I want you to call me by my first name, Marcy," he said. "I won't feel so old, that way."

She smiled into his eyes.

"I'll—I'll be glad to, Mr.——" she hesitated, "what is it?" Somehow, at the moment, his first name had slipped from her entirely. Vernon showed his surprise.

"You don't know?"

"No, honestly not."

"I thought—you'd know it—from around the factory."

She did remember now. But it was less difficult to confess she had forgotten. Then, too, it seemed not a bad idea to show him that she had never speculated or even dreamed she would ever be with him in this manner and able to call him by his first name. So she said:

"Why, it seems to have slipped from me."

"Well, call me—Leonard—or Lennie. That's what ——" suddenly he remembered how Jennie had always called him "Lennie." He could nearly see her now, standing in the doorway, as he came up the walk. "You'd best make it Leonard, I think," he exclaimed. "I guess Lennie —is too boyish for me."

"I want it to be Lennie," Marcy said, lovingly. Haltingly she added, "I want you to be—my boy. Anyway, you're just a young man—to me!"

Now he raised his glass to a level with their eyes.

"Let's drink to our future—happiness, sweetheart, and to the days and days," he caught himself as she pouted, "and months and years that you are going to love me."

Marcy took a deep swallow before she exclaimed, softly:

"And you'll love me too, won't you?"

"You bet I will."

For a time they sat gazing lovingly at each other. Over Marcy there came a feeling of soft warm happiness, and as she turned and saw the people at other tables, all their eyes seemed to be directed at her, in a curious, admiring way.

Leonard seemed better looking than ever too, with his black tie and solitary pearl stud in the middle of his soft

white shirt. She wondered if any one else had ever been so happy as she was.

"Of what are you thinking, darling?" Vernon asked suddenly.

She could see his piercing eyes. But somehow she felt she must look down, as if to hold her great joy a secret.

"Oh, nothing—just you and me."

He laughed. "That's a great deal, dear."

"Oh, you know—what I mean."

He reached his hand across the table and clasped her small fingers tightly.

"Dear little sweetheart," he murmured.

At a few minutes past nine, Vernon paid the check and they left the restaurant. The air was sweet and cool outside, and Vernon, happy in the thought that for quite the first time in his life, he need not impetuously grasp what was in his hand for fear of losing it, suggested they go to some place of amusement before taking a taxi home.

"It's early yet," he told Marcy.

But she had not the gift of prescience to know what was going on in his mind, the teasing caress he was giving his anticipations.

Walking down Broadway, which looked more like some war-time upheaval with its subway-demolition, they soon came to the Metropolitan Opera House. Here Vernon had a sudden idea and was at the box office before Marcy could restrain him.

"You ought not spend your money like this, Mr.—Leonard," she said bashfully, as she caught up with him and grasped his arm tightly. But it was too late and he had two yellow tickets in his hand. Indeed, she had a vague feeling of hurt that he should want to go to a

theatre, when they might be out at the little apartment, happy and alone.

Her feelings were changed somewhat only after they had taken their seats in the rear of the orchestra.

Then, a caressing cloud of happiness enveloped Marcy. For the first time in her life she was inside a great theatre and she became lost in a burst of dreamy reflection that she could not dispel. It was too unreal to believe. She actually pinched herself and then Vernon, to see if it were all true. And when Leonard jumped a little, startled, and questioned what was the matter, she said smiling:

"Oh, nothing—Leonard. I was—just dreaming, I guess."

The opera was Wagner's "Walkyrie" and the stirring, crashing, and then pliant stroking of the orchestra filled Marcy with a queer restlessness entirely new to her.

When Wotan had put his daughter Brunhilde to sleep upon the painted canvas rock as a punishment for her rebellion in protecting Siegmund and saving Sieglinde, a prayer came to her mind that some one else would come from behind the scenes and upon the stage and put an end to the fiery-bearded singer.

She had no idea of the story, but it could be seen easily, how mean he was to the wailing, beautiful woman who had sunk onto the rock. Once she looked at Vernon to see if he, too, were stirred. But he only whispered back in a way that surprised her:

"It's too bad it's Wagner. You'd like music that's got some sweetness, better. Some day we'll hear something from Puccini."

She felt like saying that this was wonderful enough; in fact, she was on the point of whispering back, when she saw that her feelings about it must only be the outcome of

ignorance. Somehow this music made her feel different than she had ever felt before.

Then Wotan called upon Loki, the God of Fire, and as he struck the rock with his long spear, the flame shot up on all sides, completely surrounding the sleeping figure.

Marcy, now, more than ever, was overwhelmed by the music from the orchestra. It was like some beautiful thunder, she thought. Becoming overpowered by the rising swell and sighing of the violins, the heart-rending lamentation, she held tightly to Leonard, and he squeezed her hand in return.

His only disappointment was that the lights were so low, he could hardly define the outlines of her beautiful face.

Great changes came over Marcy after that evening, which pleased Vernon immensely. She seemed to grow taller, to respond to soft clothes and better living so quickly that in a few months it was hard to believe that she had not been born in this luxury of love and adornment.

Leonard did not see her every day, but if a day passed that he did not visit her, the engulfing sadness held her so numb that even his absence did not affect her. She was alive only when with him; dead and insensate to all impressions in his absence. When the telephone would ring and she would hear his low, musical voice saying: "I'm sorry about yesterday, I'll be over in an hour, dear," she would fly about the rooms again like a young bird come to life, thirsting for the first sight of him.

At the luxurious restaurants on Broadway and the Avenue, where they always had their evening meals, she grew to know the waiters by their first names, and the

favourite dishes of the different places. When she saw the diners whisper to each other as she came in, she knew they were talking about her and the rich man who was her —friend. How she budded and bloomed under it. How proud she was of what she felt had come only out of her understanding of life.

The only thing that worried her at all was her aunt's attitude toward her. Although many presents were sent to the woman there never came back a mention of them—or a word of thanks.

Which made little difference since mostly they were sent as a sort of an outlet for her joy, or better, a silent offering on the sacrificial altar of her conscience.

With this possible exception, Marcy was very happy indeed. Blithely going along the path that Vernon paved for her feet, she never stopped to wonder if perchance there might be some thorny bush along the pathway.

Their love grew out of each other's love. There was and never could be any other consideration. It would always be this way.

It was love begotten by love. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

LEONARD could hardly understand the situation. He who had thought romance lost to him, was now overwhelmed by the tenderest affection and passion—brought to him, coupled with beauty and child-like understanding. Their feelings were like antennæ that reached out to touch each other whenever they were near, like the feelers of ants.

And how Marcy loved to do as he bid. He opened charge accounts for her at the various shops and she would appear before him time and again with some new frock that always required an evening spent in parade, first at home and then at the Ritz or the Plaza.

From a little woman, at a shop on Forty-fourth Street, she learned that her figure was heightened by wearing a tight, broad band over her breast. And this she incorporated in every gown she ordered. It really did give height to her trim figure, and changed her in other ways. Somehow she responded with lightning-like rapidity to the illusion wrought by the gown's proportions, walking more stately, never tripping along, just from sheer youthful enthusiasm, as she formerly had done.

And when she appeared before Leonard, so elegant, her cheeks glowing with natural health, her delicately curved lines faintly suggested through the thin fabric, taller, more graceful than ever he had believed possible, he could hardly restrain himself from rushing off to some Justice of the Peace or minister and obtaining a license for marriage.

Strangely he took more of an interest in his business, too. It required money to shower this luxury on Marcy, and he would sit scheming with Whittimore by the hour. More salesmen were sent out into Pennsylvania and Vermont, and through his advice a campaign was started to persuade public officials of various small towns to see that a new fire-proof glass, they were specialising in, was installed in the public institutions.

It was really a period of delightful rehabilitation for him, netting him many thousands of dollars as well as complete happiness. It had been a long time since he had been so exultant over just living, really quite the first time in his whole life. And now the most trivial things, absolutely devoid of the slightest semblance of emotional value, pleased him immeasurably.

One day, he spent at least a half hour, walking up and down in front of an automobile agency, which kept each new patron listed in small, gold letters on an oaken slab in a front window of the show-room.

"Miss Marcy Moore,"

he read under the name of two or three society leaders.

He really could not talk enough about her, or think enough about her, even seeking out Whittimore, one night, who in turn took him to a friend's apartment, Edna Mason by name. And at the luxurious duplex suite of the good-natured, little woman, a vivacious blonde, Vernon again went over all of Marcy's good points, her childish love for him, her beauty, the way she tried to please him, how quickly she had discarded gay attire and learned the knack of dressing richly, simply.

Now he entered a new world—where people had attach-

ments and where clothes and money counted for something.

"Of course," he said, "I take a little credit for it myself. At first she used to dress too gaudy. I had to tone her down."

"Yes," remarked Miss Mason, who was sitting with her elbows pressed against the arms of her chair and the tips of her fingers just touching her chin. "Little girls like this catch on quickly. You'd think they were born to it. But it is nice when a man of education and refinement like yourself, takes hold of a poor little waif like that."

And that was the first sod upturned in the garden of his discontent . . . but a veritable foundation for his oncoming unhappiness.

What could she mean by saying such a thing? Marcy was fine—delicate—honest.

What could she mean?

But the conviction pierced its way into his intelligence that the little woman had worded a thought that he saw now had always been present in his mind. And it was plain how different from Marcy was the person who told him this.

Miss Mason had a manner and air about her as if she would be at home with any one. While Marcy——

At the moment he could not help making the comparison. Marcy—were she with them at this moment—would be over-awed and silent.

Leonard hurried away from them.

"I've really got to go," he said, as they stood up and begged him to stay. It even pained him a little to see Miss Mason take hold of Whittimore's arm, as together they stood watching him put on his hat and coat.

He found himself at Marcy's door without really being aware of how he had arrived there.

"Oh, honey," she cried, "I've been waiting for more than an hour for you. You mustn't make me wait like this. It ain't nice."

She had not said "ain't" for months. Or at least he had not been aware of it. And he had spent long hours breaking her of the habit. As he stood looking at the glossy head now huddled in his arms, he reminded himself of all the trying times, when he had scolded her and she had smothered all argument by caressing him and trying to soothe him with rather endearing "baby-talk."

"You must not say 'ain't,' dear."

"I just love you," she replied. "I do. I love you."

"But 'ain't' is incorrect, Marcy."

She looked up into his face with her big eyes, wide and loving.

"Dear, I love you. What do words count with us?"

Reaching up, she drew his lips down to her lips and held him yearningly.

And the protest in his conscience was inhibited—by other calls.

But there came other incidents, spread out over a period of about five months, unworded glances that Marcy was totally unaware of, crudities in her gestures, her way of holding a fork, the strange smallness of her ears—that he seemed never to have been conscious of before. And all driving a wedge into his understanding.

Anyway, he was not bent on philanthropically groping his way through life. It was very beautiful to be so charitable and foolish—but he had wasted enough time.

Suddenly there seemed a sort of similarity between this

episode and the others with Jennie and Mabel, though at the moment he could not place his finger on it.

One night they went to the theatre. And though Marcy was truly more beautiful than any one Vernon compared her with in the audience, yet she surely lacked that tired, bored expression of good-breeding, the expression that shows how accustomed one is to it all.

She was too eager. As he sat at her side, he noticed how animated and happy she was.

Somehow—it was difficult to define—she sat up too high and erect in the seat. And as some people crowded past them, she rose hurriedly and rather apologised for being in the way. One tall woman with a collar of pearls around her neck didn't even recognise her obligation.

It was really a horrible moment for Leonard. He was aware that many women near them turned and looked at them through their lorgnettes.

Then the curtain rose on a rather lurid melodrama, a play called "The Case of Mrs. Dunne," a piece which was headed for failure on account of the obviousness and artificiality of a situation revolving around a woman who masqueraded as her own maid, while her husband was away on a business trip. It was lurid indeed. For no apparent reason the wife suspected her husband of infidelity and chose this unnecessary way of spying on him.

But Marcy, always waiting until some one applauded, usually at the back of the house, would then begin clapping her hands gleefully, more from sheer happiness than from pleasure at what the stage brought out. Time and again she did this, only to suddenly stop when her isolation became apparent.

However, she seemed to enjoy it, bubbling over with

laughter and then drooping with the wife as she confessed to her husband in the last act—a scene which brought only ridicule from the rest of the audience.

Vernon told her not to be so serious about it.

"Hold yourself in a little, dear," he whispered, smilingly, though something was tightening at the very tendrils of his heart.

And then after the theatre he accidentally blocked the way of a young girl, who, with an old woman, was rushing to their motor. The girl had a finely chiselled, delicate face, whose every lineament showed its certain breeding. He noticed, too, that her dress was cut high and modestly. At that moment he took a sidelong glance at Marcy and saw how voluptuously her rounded breasts were outlined beneath their filmy covering.

And more strangely, at that instant, Marcy cried to him, right in the midst of a crowd of people:

"Baby, don't you think we'd best walk to the car?"

He could not help looking around to see who had heard, seared by the thought that had he planned his life sensibly, he could be married now to some fine, cultured young girl, who had position and family back of her. At this very moment, they could be entering their waiting limousine with the eyes of all the others upon them.

Yet he must walk to the corner, and then go to some restaurant. They must sit and eat alone—alone—alone —good God—because they knew no one. Except Whittimore and Miss Mason. And what could Miss Mason talk to Marcy about?

No, there would be nothing to talk about. No more than what he had to talk about, as they sat over the restaurant table—nothing—the show—her dress—what they would do to-morrow night.

And so an idea formed itself in Leonard's inner consciousness, an idea he could not or would not dislodge.

After that night, he was haunted by this idea every time he left the little apartment. The idea was this: He could be having a really beautiful life now. He could be living with an exquisite wife who had many admiring friends. And they could be having evenings at home, where there was clever talk and music. In this way, he would meet others too. It would help his business in a way, even.

He was suffering now simply because of lack of foresight. Again he had mismanaged, had not reached high enough. Anybody could get what they went after, if they were persistent. The trouble was that now that he had money, he did not appreciate himself.

Then one day, Marcy questioned him:

"Sweetheart, what's the matter? You act so—preoccupied, lately."

He noticed the deep-circling hollows about her eyes as she spoke.

He was tempted to tell her, yet held himself back, on the verge of saying: "It's no go, Marcy, I'm sorry. But we've got to part. I'm doing myself an injustice by living this way, though you wouldn't understand it, I'm afraid."

He would have said all this, did he not realise that it was foolish to do this until he had found—the other woman.

He would be losing a lot of real pleasure without gaining anything.

Some one had said something about not throwing out dirty water until you had got clean water.

But he did act more and more sullen and on occasions was actually unkind to her, which she took for restless-

ness, and worry over business, or just simple shifts in his temper.

And she treated him even better, more sweetly, amiably —more baby-like.

"My own, poor little boy," she would murmur,—"Just come to Muzzer."

And Leonard, indulging now in a constant survey of the situation, became shamed by remorse at what he had done. It was made more and more poignant by the thought that came intermittently but resolutely, that he was settled for life in just this manner. He questioned himself incessantly about it, in his bath, as he shaved, or dressed himself.

It really became a practice with him to visualise himself as he would be in a few short years.

Somehow he saw himself on a mortuary couch, an old man, shrivelled up and spent.

One night, with eyes sunken and face pale from loss of sleep, he talked for hours with Edna Mason and Whittimore.

"I am really worried about it," he confided to them. "She doesn't seem to realise that I must have an evening to myself now and then, like to-night, for instance. Then she always wants me by her, and yet she doesn't seem to acquire the things that will show people she had the right sort of stuff in her. You know what I mean?"

Whittimore interjected:

"Well, what do you care about people—Vernon; what do people care about your happiness? Why do you try to fool yourself, anyway?"

"That isn't exactly what I mean, my friend," Leonard insisted, "I mean—the little things that only *I* would notice. You know a man is bound to be conscious of them,"

his brows contracted and he said quite to himself, "more and more."

Whittimore smiled. "I'm afraid you haven't got enough confidence in your own opinion of what is so important to you." Quite seriously, he added, "I believe you would change your entire idea about things if I were to tell you that your little girl was the most exquisite and innately refined little person I had ever come across." He hesitated, then said slowly: "I believe your tragedy is that you are going through life, waiting for other people to appraise what you have."

Vernon looked up, startled, just as Whittimore's companion exclaimed with an approving glance:

"I think Mr. Vernon is right. I believe he realises he is trying to work with material that isn't there."

After that, Vernon was haunted and harrowed more than ever, thinking continually that what Miss Mason said was right. That this was the secret back of the whole situation. One had to be born to the manner and once they were—that way—nothing could change it. Look at himself. His ideals and desires for finer things were as high as ever. And that was just the reason it was inevitable that two people like him and Marcy could never work it out. She did not have the foundation to build on. It was all only a fancy, a sheer, flimsy, unstable dream. All because he was so indecisive, so weak. Even if his great precept was never to hurt others, he must also think of not hurting himself too. Yes, he was just a weakling. Other men, realising the impossibility of a structure—he was building a structure, yes, giving his years to it—would dismiss it without thought. He was always hanging on, waiting for some magic to work, that would fix everything all right as he deserved.

. . . It was during this period that Edna Mason sent a note to a Mrs. Bellamy, living at Milford, Conn., where formerly she, too, had resided. The note was in answer to one received by her.

"Dearest Dehlia:

"Your letter has pained me more than I can possibly tell you. Truly I am grieved that Charline is so wayward, and grieved more that you are so worried and unhappy about her. It is strange, indeed, how things do happen. Only a night before last, I was speaking with a friend of mine, a Mr. Vernon. I told him all about you, Dehlia. He is one of the most charming men one could possibly meet. And a dear friend of Mr. Whittimore's, whom of course I've told you about before.

"Now this is the idea, Dehlia, dear. I want you to cut out the heavy thinking, and get into New York here with me. You've done enough mourning about Henry. Heaven knows, he left you little as it is. I just would love to have you. And I believe it is the thing for you and Charline to do anyway. She'd have all kinds of chances here and I miss my guess, if you won't care just a little for Mr. Vernon. He's just your type, if I can remember back—sort of sad and sentimental. I think he's around forty. For one reason or another, he's just ripe for somebody to pluck now, too.

"So don't be foolish, Dehlia. Just pick up and warn me when the train leaves. I know, if anybody does, what being in the rut in Milford means.

"I'll look for you in about a week. If you don't come, why, I'll come and get you.

"Lots of love,

"Edna.

"P. S.—Am serious, old friend."

CHAPTER XXIX

SOME few days later, Whittimore invited Leonard to join him at dinner and to bring along Marcy, so that Edna "might get to know her better."

So they met at the Plaza, in the lobby, at about eight o'clock. On the way over, Leonard told Marcy to try and not act too interested in things, but to be just a little bored, in fact, to watch Miss Mason and emulate her.

But somehow, as they all walked through the lobby into the dining room, Leonard felt that he could read the thoughts of the diners that were present.

Marcy had on a black, dull silk dress, cut very low, and below the broad band of black crêpe de chine over her breast, there was a corseted effect down to her hips which gave her body an enticing undulation and freedom as she took each step. Whittimore was really full of admiration for the child, even whispering as they walked:

"Lucky dog, Vernon."

But Edna did not approve of Marcy, somehow, and her manner, much too kindly and affable, made it plain to Leonard that she would watch over Marcy and see each mistake that the girl made.

She called Marcy "dear," right from the start of the meal. "If I were you, dear,—I should brush my hair back straight from the forehead. I believe it would become you—make you a little older looking, too, dear."

She looked at Vernon while Marcy, sensing the injustice of the woman's patronage, felt that it was being done only to get back Whittimore's attention, for he seemed to be

staring at her queerly, no matter how much she tried not to notice him.

However, it was only toward the end of the meal that she realised that Leonard too was studying her, unkindly, in a manner utterly strange. And after that, she could not control herself, doing things that she absolutely did not want to do. She was unable to say the slightest word to the woman, or even to Vernon or Whittimore. She could only sit quietly and try to hold herself from getting up and telling Miss Mason what she thought of her.

Though disaster came soon enough. Led on by the soft light and the music from an adjoining palm room, Edna crooned out some chanting negro songs, semi-religious and dirge-like, but in a soft voiced dialect that was really interesting and clever. Each song was followed by admiring words from Vernon, who, held by the woman, listened intently. He murmured complimentary phrases while Marcy suddenly realised that he was not paying the slightest attention to her.

It seemed as if it were left to Whittimore to amuse her. But to him she could not say more than the slightest "yes" or "no" and once when he asked her if she didn't sing, she felt like telling him that there was a song that she knew, and then get up and show Vernon that she wasn't suffering the slightest bit. But she was stifled, inarticulate from worry over the man she loved and could only answer, "Oh, no, I don't sing." She even hated herself for the moment for appearing so numb.

She sat there amidst all the splendour, not eating, silent, unhappy—only noticing how Vernon's eyes rested on Edna Mason, or roamed about the room to the adjoining tables.

Once, when Leonard quite spontaneously exclaimed:

"There are certainly a lot of exquisitely gowned women here, aren't there?" she could hardly control herself from defiantly standing up in front of him and saying, "Well, what's the matter with me?"

The meal was finished near ten o'clock and Whittimore suggested that they run up to Edna's apartment at the Pranton.

So they got up, and, after receiving their wraps, had the car called. They rode across town in silence, though Edna, acting as if she realised Vernon's unhappiness, talked more than ever, and directed her words entirely at Vernon. And again, Marcy sat rigid and unhappy in a haze of isolated embarrassment, conscious more than ever of her inability to cope with the little woman on the seat opposite her.

She heard such a variety of topics, too; the exhibit at some gallery or other, of a new painter from Spain, the bill at the Princess Theatre, the Russian dancers—then shifting in kaleidoscopic fashion to a half dozen other subjects, all equally meaningless to her ears.

How Leonard listened to the woman! She noticed as they went into the Pranton entrance, that he accidentally held on to her arm for a moment as he helped her into the elevator.

Then when they reached the white and gold apartment, two extraordinary things happened, each having a certain relation to the other.

While Leonard was dancing with Edna, to the accompaniment of the graphophone, Marcy heard the woman whisper:

"I did something for you, the other night. I wrote a little note."

As she sat and talked to Whittimore, Marcy could see

how Leonard was questioning Miss Mason. Perhaps it was just as well that she did not hear clearly what the little woman said into his ear.

"I guess I'll have to save you from yourself. It's with a dear friend of mine. She's only thirty-six and a corker. You'll like her. She used to be mighty pretty when I knew her."

But she completed her understanding as she watched the expression on Leonard's face, as he asked:

"Is she intelligent, like you? And does she know about —the good things of life?"

The other was that Marcy, unable to longer hold back her feelings any longer, ran up to Leonard and cried:

"Oh, Lennie, please take me away from here. I'm terribly unhappy."

Leonard answered brutally:

"You'll stay here until I'm ready to take you home, unless——" he worded the thought earnestly enough, "unless you want to take the car home yourself now."

That was the last word she had with him that night.

Although she did sit and wait until Vernon, petulant that his evening had been spoilt, took hold of her arm, and quite dragged her out of the place and to the elevator.

CHAPTER XXX

IN silence, the next morning, Vernon sat reading his newspaper, while the steam from the percolator on the table obscured from Marcy all but his eyes.

Marcy could not control her anger. She was even ashamed for the sake of Nina, the coloured servant, who kept coming into the room with scrutinising glances first at Vernon and then at her.

But one thought she no longer could hold back.

Suddenly she was conscious of the great distance that lay between their feelings for each other.

It did not seem possible that this smooth-faced and calm man, so quietly reading his paper, could be metamorphosed into the temper-ridden, relentless individual of the night before. She could not help likening him to some animal who had devoured his victim and was now purring in content.

Sensing her scrutiny of him, Vernon looked up from his paper. Calmly enough he asked her what was on her mind.

"I—I'll tell you some day," she answered thoughtfully.

With only a glance at her as if to say, "Well, that's your affair," he went back to his paper, buried himself in it for a few moments, and then casually remarked even as he read: "I might have to go out to the factory to-day. One of the foremen didn't show up. See if you can amuse yourself. I ought to be back to-morrow."

When he became conscious of her continual strange observation of him he added: "For God's sake, child, don't sit there staring like that at me. Come, what's the matter?"

With gaping eyes but shrinking manner, Marcy kept gazing at him. At last he put his paper down entirely: "Now, what in the world is the matter? You are too pretty to look so sad. And let's forget last night. I've got a lot to think about these days."

He looked at his white metalled watch and then compared it with the little French clock on the mantel and for a moment busied himself regulating a hand; then gathering his paper and folding it so that it would fit into his pocket, he rose from the table. At last he could no longer tolerate the wondering look on Marcy's face.

"Well?" he said, hardly able to control his temper.

Slowly Marcy began, "You know, Leonard—I don't know you—you are just a stranger. I don't know why it never came to me before."

She kept up her aggravating scrutiny of him until he went out in the hall and put on his light grey overcoat and derby hat. When he came back into the room for his newspaper he said, easily, "I'll just give you a thought for the day. If you think I've grown cold all of a sudden, why don't you ask yourself if it isn't because you are that way to me?"

Only when he added: "I've got to defend myself some way," her pent-up feelings betrayed themselves.

"I—I've learned something—about men," she cried, without control—her voice more like that of an aggrieved woman than of a young girl—"Men are devils."

Vernon walked around the table to the back of her chair and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Now, Marcy," he said, "I suppose I've spoiled you. Of course men are all alike. You had just as well know that. It's only their methods that are different. That is what makes the difference between, well, for instance —between me and somebody else. Why shouldn't we look things squarely in the face? You know how many times I have told you that there are laws in life that cover everything. Now, we are up against one of those laws. That's what keeps the world going. If everybody slipped into some rut along the road and stayed there a lifetime—well, nobody would ever get any place. Now," he placed his hands under her chin, "now kiss me, Marcy. I've got to go."

She looked up at him with wide-open, accusing eyes, and instead of meekly giving in to him and following his slightest call, she spoke bitterly. "I thought you were so—fine—and now I know that you don't care about me. You are just brutal. Why," she hesitated over the thought, "you're no different than Lester Moore. I want to love you. But, when I think of how you really are I can hardly help—hating you."

The impetuous words startled Vernon. He could never control her, he saw, if her love for him was lost. As he stood, and watched her soft round chin tremble with anger and her cheeks flush with temper, he thought: "I mustn't lose her yet." There even flashed into his mind the possibility of some one else, Whittimore perhaps, being able to have her love, and hear her childish words of affection. So he changed his manner on the instant, letting her see that he was really affected by her hard words, even hurt by them. He pulled up a chair and sat very close, and looking deep into her eyes, said, in a way that showed he was suffering more than she must know:

"Please don't talk like that, Marcy. You have gone through so much already, and it hurts me to see you just the least bit unhappy."

Instantly he saw that he had not lost his control over her, that she still loved him as a master, though a fear assailed him that if he showed himself weak to her he would lose his power over her entirely. He must strike a happy medium, he told himself, so that when he did break away he could still be protected by her love for him. That was the thing he must not lose sight of.

So he said, a little more sternly now: "Why, Marcy, you are a woman—not a little girl. And two people can't go on the way we have, unless there is some sort of understanding between them—about things—life in general, you know. Nobody can go on indefinitely without having a pretty good idea of what he is doing."

He rose from his chair and began pacing the floor, while Marcy watched him, her little nostrils dilating in rhythmic companionship with the racking throbs in her throat.

"You know we are just puppets, Marcy. You—everybody. We do things—like you and I have done—we're happy, then hesitate—then plunge—and yet all the time in the back of our hearts there is the idea that if we follow the crowd along the path we take, we will have to meet the worries and the same end, with the rest of the crowd. We haven't got any other chance."

She failed to answer him, only sitting rigid and staring at him. Then in an instant her manner changed to one less passive. She jumped up from her chair and with a wild lunge tore past him into the next room, where she threw herself upon the cushioned divan.

Vernon was held aghast for a moment, disappointed

that she should not have welcomed his words with some such appeal as had always been her wont. If she defied him, nothing could be accomplished. He followed her quickly, then, into the living room, and apologetically tried to gather her in his arms, saying repeatedly, as he tried to control her, "Now listen, Marcy; you must understand things the way I mean them."

However he tried to soften her anger she would not listen, only crying, "Stay away from me, I hate you."

Vainly he tried to quell her frenzy.

"Marcy, Marcy, listen, you are so wonderful and beautiful."

She did seem at that moment extraordinarily inviting. Her bosom heaved tumultuously and her hair had fallen down onto its curves, which gave her a Madonna-like appearance.

Impetuously, he grabbed her, fought down her arms and kissed her on the cheeks and mouth. "Kiss me back," he demanded, breathless from his exertions.

But Marcy did not heed him, and Vernon saw that his old strategies, for some unaccountable reason, had lost their influence over her. As he watched her delicious figure, crumpled in the cushions, he wondered how he could reason her out of her strange attitude toward him. He would not believe that it was all over now. It was really difficult to know what to do at the moment.

And yet, of her own volition, she had never so gallantly defied him. Wondering if it were possible that some one had been talking to her and advising her, he asked:

"Have you seen anybody and talked to them about—us? Is there some other man?"

And then the instinctive cry of allegiance that the dog has for its master, the searching peal for its mother of

the lambless ewe gone desolately astray, found its way to the girl's mind—and Vernon knew that he had not lost her yet. And that he had been reasoning above her emotional order. She said, in answer to his question: "Oh, Leonard, how can you think of such a thing, when you know you are the only man in the world that I love?" So the process went on.

He saw that he still controlled her, that his mistake had been to think her a woman of the world, of mutable inclinations, when she was only the simple little girl that loved him, and that she could never be otherwise.

He told himself that the Maker creates all manner of men or women, but that his mistake had been to think that natures can change. In the instant he saw that Marcy would always love him, that she was one of Nature's children that love once and eternally.

He felt a little sorry when the full conviction of this knowledge smote him. For he saw that she would never defend herself, that she would never offer battle, but go to the end of her days a love-child giving always and only happy when this side of her nature had expression.

And so immediately he became gentle with her, and caressing and kind, smoothing back her soft hair, explaining to her that his temper was not an easy thing to control, that love distorted all things. Kneeling down beside her he gently took her hands and patted them, told her how he cared for her, the while he searched her eyes until they yielded to him and made him feel a little ashamed that this power over her was so complete. He saw that he had found the dominating note of her nature, and through that, now, he would always be safe no matter what happened, as long as he made his attack along that line.

And when Marcy heard the caressing words shrouding his desire for her, she felt sorry she had doubted him, and guilty for having made the man who really loved her suffer so. She resisted him no longer.

"Oh, you get so cruel, sometimes," she cried, with pouting lips, "but I'm sorry if I hurt you. I understand you better now. You do love me, don't you?"

He whispered back:

"Why, Marcy, my little foolish sweetheart!" But the pity of it all filled him with sadness.

She then leaned over and framed his face with her two soft hands. "Kiss me then," she begged—"'cause I love you, and always will."

And Vernon, again invaded by the disenchantment that attainment always brought him, wondered if he would ever meet a woman who would stimulate him by defying him, a woman who would make him rise to the heights of conquest by being adamant.

He had a trying time with himself that night, however. Forced by some whim, when he left Marcy, he entered the subway at Ninety-sixth Street and stayed underground till he was at the Battery, looking out over the water of the bay. Then he went up into the fresh air and walked across the park, beckoned on his way by a tribe of chirping sparrows, protesting against this intrusion, until he stood at the edge of the water.

Somehow, he felt overwhelmed with melancholy. The inky expanse of water, stretching out like a bottomless pit, seemed as desolate and barren as his feelings. Walking along slowly, with head down, listening to the lapping of the waves as they struck the logs of the shore wall beneath him, he thought over what strange turns life had taken for him.

Perhaps a mile out, a tiny light was blinking along its uneven course. But no human sound came out of the idle bay's watery expanse. Only a spot of denser darkness showed itself gradually where the Island held the Statue of Liberty.

Suddenly he thought of all the people who must have found a watery grave around the small, beacon-light of Freedom that topped the silhouetted structure—people who had yearned and hoped, perhaps as he had. He thought on, that this might have been their way of gaining Liberty.

Death lurked in his soul.

For the moment he could not blame people for having such a horror of the dead that they buried them far underground—away from their thoughts. He could not help looking at the water through the eyes of his depression—and the dark, rolling surface became actually inviting.

Transfixed, the idea encompassed him. It took some strength to turn and run away from it, not stopping till he reached the protecting entrance of a side street saloon marked "Seaman's Rest," with a red light over the door. He found himself actually muttering with fright as he entered.

Inside he saw a rough crowd of men hanging over the bar. But he ran up and cried hoarsely: "Gimme a drink of whiskey."

It was not until he had got it down that he felt entirely safe from the watery grave.

It had seemed to him as he looked at the black water, and the Island resting on it, that there was a great coffin, resting on the sea, waiting for him, with a light above it to show him the way.

CHAPTER XXXI

FORGETFUL, unconscious of passing time, Marcy grew to actually believe Vernon her mate. And she began making certain demands of him.

Such unwise demands as the wife makes of her husband.

She became utterly blind so far as her own welfare was concerned, and as utterly unaware of the real reason for Vernon's increasing restlessness and periods of brooding whenever he was with her.

Many times she would become curious to know what held him so unhappy. But she blindly took his passivity as having something to do with his love for her, and smiled at any troubling idea.

One day she ran over to him, fondled his face and caressed his hair and said:

"Leonard, you ought to be terribly happy when you know I love you so." Laughing in a queer, broken fashion she told him: "I'm just so happy; things like what are going to happen are just too far away to think about. Now be a little more cheery."

And Vernon looked at her while the thought gnawed its way into his consciousness that here again was yet another—Jenny—and commonplaceness—and blunder—blunder! And he became racked by the thought that some vindictive fate was pursuing him with the Jennies of the world—that he would never get away from them. But the days managed to pass somehow, covered by a veneer of

hypocrisy on his part and a blind grasping at whatever was offered on the part of Marcy. And though they had no more harsh words there still was not the complete happiness that Marcy kept praying for. It was much as if she were waiting on a sand beach, for the tide to go out so that the sand might be free to dry its entire breadth in the sunlight, and the tide never went back—only crept a little closer.

Then, one night, Vernon phoned to say that he could not stop in over the week-end.

"I'm sorry, honestly—but it's business. I've got to do it," came his soft voice at her ears.

Marcy was woefully affected. All day she had been anticipating him and resting so that she would not look tired or worn. When evening had come, the coloured maid had helped her into a new gown that she had found on Fifth Avenue only the day before, a gown that blended perfectly with her hair and her skin. She had even dressed hurriedly in fear that he would come before she was ready, which gave her so long a time to sit waiting for him. She had purposely turned the lights down low, too, so that he would come in and at first not discover her. With many a little burst of glee she had gone over the picture of his surprise when the first thing he knew her arms were around his neck. She thought a good deal about how he would be affected by her appearance, how he would stand her off in front of him and gaze at her proudly and then say, as he had done so many times: "Won't we be proud tonight, when they see us walk through the Plaza."

She could even picture his proud manner when the head-waiter would come up and say: "Good evening, Mr. Vernon, I've saved your table for you."

And then, through the black receiver of the telephone

she had heard him say—that he would not come—home.

His manner seemed cold and hard, she thought; over the wires it sounded like words made of ice or moulded in steel.

"At least, Lennie," she pleaded, "you might have run in for a minute."

He stayed away from her for three whole days. And those three days Marcy lay in her chintz-curtained bedroom, inert and listless, with the covers high over her, a vain effort to warm the inner chill of her soul.

She had just the slightest diversion when a Mrs. Ranier called, a sweet-faced, blonde, little woman, of about thirty-eight, who lived alone across the hall.

"I just thought I would run in. I noticed that your—husband—" she hesitated and smiled in a knowing way, "wasn't in."

Marcy started to protest, even become angry, but Mrs. Ranier's manner was so motherly, she could only comment:

"Yes; he's been away a good deal lately."

The woman said: "I understand, dear child." And then hurried on to tell about her own life, while her eyes seemed to devour the beautiful Marcy.

"I had a little girl, dear—by my second husband, and you mustn't mind if I mother you a little."

Sitting in the light from the pink-shadowed piano-lamp, the pert little woman talked for an hour or more, while Marcy listened and felt a real comfort in having her near. Although she listened incessantly for Vernon's ring or his steps on the front walk.

The woman said softly:

"Yes, dearie, my little one died, but not before I learned something that has lasted with me ever since. I have

found out what love means. Oh, yes; love of any kind." As Marcy looked up questioningly, she continued: "Yes; the love of a man and woman or a mother and her child —it's all the same."

She thought on: "Why, I used to sit at night and study the little one's profile and think to myself how wonderful it was—and that a living, throbbing being could come out of love." The woman looked up smiling. "I think she'd have grown up beautiful like you, too, Mrs.——"

Marcy broke in as the woman hesitated:

"Mrs. Vernon——"

With an apology that she didn't remember seeing the name on the letterbox, she went on, pausing long enough to say that her own name was Mrs. Ranier, spelled R-a-n-i-e-r; then saying, "Yes; she had your silky hair, too, deary, and your fresh skin and even as a little thing was just as slender as you."

For a moment her eyes seemed to rest on the gentle outward curve at Marcy's hips, made even more alluring by the soft silk covering.

Then she sighed, and said: "Yes, my dear, you are very lucky."

"I know I am," Marcy said earnestly. "But what makes you think so?"

"Oh, in having such a fine man as Mr. Vernon. He's some handsome man!" she exclaimed with admiration in her voice, "and so refined, too."

Marcy looked at her. "Yes; he is—isn't he?"

It brought joy to her heart to have this woman speak well of the man she loved.

Mrs. Ranier went on, while the thought came to Marcy

that she must keep her talking so that she would stay and could meet Leonard.

"I've been married twice—though I'm—" she hesitated —"only twenty-nine now. But I've been unlucky, poor and all that. I've had to take what the Fates handed me, but you bet I got rid of my second quick enough. He was at least twenty years older than I."

"Oh, how terrible," Marcy exclaimed.

"Well, it was terrible. I used to lie by his side and see his grizzly face and coarse, wrinkled skin and think how wonderful it would be to have some one like your husband, fine and smart-looking. Anyway, it got so I could hardly stand him. Once, I remember I did forget myself and put my arm around him, when I was half asleep."

Held by the woman's intimate and friendly way, Marcy was really interested; quite disgustedly, she exclaimed: "Oh, how terrible; what did he do?"

"Do! Why—he was downright surprised, thought he had started up some love in me; took hold of me and began calling me pet-names, 'sweetheart,' his 'little one.' Then I woke up and saw his wrinkled face and bleary eyes——"

Her face changed in expression now. There was a different light in her eyes.

"It was then I determined to be a mother, Mrs. Vernon. I wanted love and affection, and as long as I was married to him, I couldn't have it and be true to him—unless it came through a child."

She reflected, while Marcy looked on with rising sympathy:

"Maybe a lot of women are like that. You see," she added, "it was the only chance I had at love, anyway."

Vernon did not come in until Monday. And Marcy

tried to meet him with a gay manner, as though nothing had happened, and she had amused herself and not noticed the passing time. This, she had discovered, from a "Letters to the Lovelorn" column of an evening paper, was the way to bring back a husband who is wandering from you. The futility of this method, applied to her own case, smote her, but she must grope at anything, even if her intelligence told her what was the truth.

She thought, too, that this would anger him and make him suspicious. But it was a bulwark which gave her no protection. Vernon was restless more than ever. His voice was gentle but contained no lover's message. And though she knew how he rebelled at any pecking word from her even as she wanted to say something buoyant and casual, her desire inexplicably fused with thoughts of punishing him and of displaying real evidence of her lonely vigil. And she burst out:

"That was the first time you ever stayed away from me so long, Leonard, without calling me up."

"I am sorry, dear," he answered.

But he ventured no further explanation, and his eyes were hard and thoughtful looking.

Vernon's absences became the usual order during a period that covered the next three months. Beyond annoyances like whispered gossip that came to her ears through the maid and the very noticeable ostracism of the tenants (except Mrs. Ranier across the hall), which disturbed her very little, nothing really unusual happened that she could point out as an event. However, it did seem as if there had been a great change, as if an alien hand were controlling things for her.

While this state of affairs lasted Marcy watched assiduously for the definite thing to happen that would allow

her to go to Vernon and tell him exactly how things were different. But he would only come in and be as gentle and kind with her as ever.

During the bright, crisp days of early fall, he even seemed to be more like himself again for a time, which made Marcy once more gay and happy. Indeed, she accepted his every changing mood as being indicative of his feelings only at the moment; as if she had builded in her inner consciousness, a protective understanding that it was better to be deceived and get what had the semblance of fidelity, than to peer down into the depths and destroy that which was at least fooling her.

But one night when she had thought him even too gentle and respectful to her, she said:

"Lennie, I am terribly worried. And I can't tell you just what it is that makes me feel that way. I honestly believe you don't care as much for me as you used to. I feel as if you wanted to be away from me and only saw me because you did not want to hurt me." She came over and knelt down on the floor by his side and placed her head on his knee. "I found something awfully funny in a magazine to-day," she went on. "It said something about a love that dies, being like drinking water after you had had wine. It made me think that maybe that is the way it is with us, now."

When he kept strangely silent her fright became more real.

"Oh, tell me," she cried, "you mustn't just think like that. Tell me the truth."

After repeated imploring from her, Vernon finally got up and tore himself away. And for the first time in a long while his voice had the ring of one forced against his will to speak unpleasantly:

"Just leave me alone, Marcy," he said, "I can't tell you."

He started pacing the room.

Sitting stupefied for a time, all she could do was to follow him frantically with her eyes.

Then she managed to break loose from the spell which held her, and ran to his side.

"Do you mean it?" she cried. "Oh, I can't believe it." She added resolutely: "No; I won't believe it." Then she faced him squarely again, holding on to the sleeve of his coat. "Do you know what you are doing to me, Lennie? Well, I'll tell you. You're killing me when all I want to do is live—just to love you."

In another moment she had crushed into a heap on the floor at his feet.

For nearly a minute Vernon gazed down at her, while the thought came into his mind that this certainly was the beginning of the end for them. That it was of no use now to follow the old recipe of gentleness. He must go on brutally to the finish, fighting the consequences as they came.

He knelt down beside her and raised her head, struck by the thought that she looked quite lifeless, that maybe some heart attack had stricken her and that she was dead. That would be a dilemma, indeed. He might even be charged with some crime. There flashed before him the incriminating headlines of a newspaper.

And Vernon grew actually scared, slapping her wrists frenziedly for a time, and then running into the bathroom and getting a glass of water which he brought back and dashed full in her face.

When she slowly opened her eyes and he saw that she was all right again, the thought encompassed him that

she had been shamming just to scare him, or to make him sorry for his treatment of her.

But he smoothed her temples gently, the while she sobbed, thinking that if he let this time pass it would not be long before she would thrust all the responsibility of her life upon him. He saw that she would be so helpless that even like a father, more than a lover, he would have to take care of her.

And that was not the sort of thing for him.

Standing over the dishevelled little figure, Leonard became lost between pity for her and pity for himself, between the understanding that she needed him and the realisation that the rest of his life would be ruined if he let his pity for her control him. He looked down at her throbbing temples. Their beating vessels seemed to send out an appeal for help which was even the more emphasised by one or two strands of prematurely grey hair.

It was, indeed, a difficult proposition to complete the task he had set out to accomplish.

When he began to talk again to the tearful child, he had to turn his face away, so that his resolution would not be weakened by any appeal from her. So he spoke quickly, in an attempt to crowd in all the words he could muster, before her frail cry might weaken him.

"Marcy, listen," he said, looking down over her again. "I'm going to leave. I've been thinking about it for months and months. I can't go on with this. You are getting older and I—well—I want you to have some real kind of a home where you can live decently and get honestly what you deserve."

She raised herself with mouth agape at his words. And then, as if to shut off further argument, she placed her

hand to his lips and cried: "Why, haven't I been good? Have I ever done anything wrong?"

"That isn't what I mean, Marcy," he went on, his brow deep with furrows. "I mean—a different kind of home. You don't think now but—well, in a few years I'll be so old you won't care for me."

"I will always care for you," she broke in.

He lifted his hand protestingly.

"Oh, you say it now, Marcy, but I've lived longer than you have. I know." His words came in more restless fashion. "Anyway, we have got to think about it. If we went on much longer it would be too late for you, so we've got to think about it now, Marcy. It's only for you that I say this. You know I am not thinking about myself."

At last the words were out. He wondered how he had accomplished it. Not daring to look at her, yet he knew she was sinking to the floor and hysterically trying to argue with him.

To shut this off he continued, without looking at the crumpled heap at his feet. But he found there was a cold sweat breaking out upon his forehead, which he wiped away with his silk handkerchief. Then he went on:

"Yes, Marcy, there's a price to pay for everything in this world, and we both have given our years. People never realise things like this until it is too late. Marcy, I would be a criminal if I let you give yourself to me any longer."

After a moment, the intelligence came to him that now would be a good time to go. So he walked to the door, saying as he went:

"You know I'll do the square thing by you. You can have all the furniture and to-morrow I want you to stop

at the office at say—ten o'clock. Now," he reached into his inside coat pocket and thoughtfully withdrew a leather packet from which he took out a yellow-back bill, "here's some money, Marcy, for a few days—if you don't feel able to come down to-morrow."

He took his hat from the chair and walked out of the room.

While Marcy, for just one kind word from him even yet, would willingly have crucified herself on the very tree whereon her anguish had engraved deep the legend of her past love and devotion.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT was a grey twilight in the room before Marcy had strength to raise herself from where she had slipped to the floor. Even then she had not the ability to review the situation or make any plans. There was only a terrible ache in her heart—an unutterable pain—as if it had been torn out of her body—and its wound left gaping. Even the wind at the door made her feel as if some poor wanderer was outside, waiting to take her away.

Just for a passing moment she recalled Vernon's last words. And then she cried to the bare walls:

"You hear! The man you loved offered you money—do you hear—the man you loved?"

She sank back on to the floor again, sobbing, though no tears came into her eyes. It was as if they flowed into some internal well of misery.

Another hour passed.

And she held out until the darkness of the room became intolerable. Then she groped her way into the hall of the apartment building and through the front door into the street, lacking the courage to turn on the switch button and see by light, all the things that would remind her of him. She walked out of the house, bent, like an old woman, starting at each touch of the furniture or the walls. When she reached the sidewalk there was the same queer proportion to everything. Things were distorted, dark, gloomy looking: the corner lamps looked streaky, dim, the street, narrow and dark; everything seemed to

be touched by the same destructive hand of sadness that was rending her, heart and soul.

Shuddering, she walked on, fearing to take each step as if it would carry her to greater unhappiness.

Continually in front of her, though very vague in outline, was her scene with Vernon. How he had stood over her, talking. How bitterly mean he had appeared. How she had loved him. And now she would have him no longer. No longer could she touch his soft hair with her hands, or kiss him unexpectedly, as he came in the front door. He had left her because he was tired of her. That was it. She had noticed it coming for months.

A man passed her without the slightest notice, even though she was sobbing. And somehow Marcy felt more poignantly alone than ever. Was it a common sight for sobbing women whose hearts had been broken to pass along the city's streets, she asked herself.

Hardly aware of how she got there, Marcy found herself in front of The Welton, the hotel where Vernon had his own apartments. As she looked up she saw lights in the fourth story where his apartment was. The curtains were drawn to. "He's probably up there," she told herself, "and already forgetting me." She looked at the stone steps and the white marble entrance which led into the warm light inside. She could never again have the right to go in that entrance with him.

Overcome suddenly by weakness, Marcy sank down against the iron railing, her body convulsed by deep internal sobs that every moment seemed to gain fuller sway, while a chill wind rattled through the trees and scattered the dry, crackling leaves about her, whirling them into an eddy around her feet for an instant, and finally chasing

them off into the gutter . . . dead leaves, refuse, until the street-cleaner came, or the snows.

Sinking into a heap in the shadow of the entrance, she lay there benumbed, barely conscious of her surroundings until the big-coated doorman, not recognising her as the little friend of the man who tipped so liberally, shoved her on down the street.

To be alone, Marcy dismissed her maid on the morning following Vernon's departure. Sight of the inquisitive darky brought back too many memories. After the woman had bid her a sweet good-bye, Marcy went to her room and like an automaton thereafter slept and ate.

For four days on end she hardly stirred. Mentally and physically she was inert. Life gave forth no vibrations in her body or soul. No greater was her desire for a way out of her dilemma than was her ability to choose that pathway; just a dull ache from head to foot and a fast withering of desire to live. Even what was labelled *love* in her inner consciousness had foundered in a sea of painful reality.

Day and night she either lay on her bed or sat by the low front window, swinging back and forth in a rocking chair, neither thinking nor seeing, but swinging to and fro, like a pendulum, as if certain hours must be swung away before she could live again, or die. It was like an atonement.

Many times during these hours Marcy thought in a vague, inco-ordinated way, that she must die, which usually ended with the self interrogation, "But why should I die? He wouldn't care——"

This was the order of her life until the fifth night after Vernon's departure, when, automatically and with no reason in her mind for doing so, she attired herself as for

some holiday jaunt, walked over to the subway station on Broadway and down the steps to the platform, as if she had some business or an actual engagement to attend to.

When the train reached Times Square, she came out with the rest of the crowd and was soon up on the street moving along with the restless throng.

She wondered a little why she had left the apartment, although now there was a certain mocking cry way back in her mind against her innocent pose, that told her the only reason she had come out was the hope of catching a glimpse of the man she loved.

At one huge hotel a policeman held her back while a half dozen well-groomed women in shining gowns crossed the path in front of her and entered waiting motor cars. Further along the street she saw a young girl, quite her own age, lifted into a car by a young man. The fellow smiled up at the girl as he helped her, and Marcy saw the girl, in a movement quick as the wind, brush a kiss against the upturned face.

Marcy had a fight to keep from crying out. Why, through no fault of her own, had she been robbed of all future happiness?

And now Marcy walked along the lighted street more hurriedly. It seemed to her as if she were tramping on forbidden ground. Wondering if every one had money and love that did not trouble them, she exclaimed aloud bitterly as she walked: "Oh, what has he done to me? Won't I ever be happy again?" She even tried to tell herself that when she went back to the little apartment Vernon would be awaiting her; that it had all been a wild nightmare. Then, strangely she fell to speculating if it were all her fault, if a girl like her had no right to the happiness she had known.

It was under the lights of Columbus Circle that Marcy, held back by a line of motor cars, caught a glimpse of some women in evening dress in a limousine, smoking and laughing gaily. As she watched, there crept into her thoughts, even gripped at her heart, a solacing understanding of all this world of sham.

"I know," she told herself; "they're just too scared to think about—things."

Now she stopped in front of a brilliantly lighted restaurant above the Circle where a gold-bedecked porter stood ready to open the door of each successive automobile that came, a place where Vernon and she had had so many happy times together. Strangely the place brought back to her a whole succession of events quite from the time she had so ignorantly married Lester Moore.

As Marcy stood there, looking in upon the crowd eating and drinking, a policeman came along and prodded her with his nightstick.

"Get along, kid," he said. "Nothin' doing here."

When she failed to move, he took her arm and repeated hotly: "Do you hear?"

Marcy took hold of the thick fingers that squeezed her arm and cried out angrily, "Why, I am only looking in."

But the officer laughed at her and muttered gruffly: "Never mind the innocent game. Now get along."

And then a doll-like woman with golden hair and wide-open eyes but with a face matured by wise wrinkles, stepped out of a car. She was accompanied by a tall man muffled in a heavy evening coat. The policeman had already shoved Marcy out of the shadows of the restaurant, but she was not too far away to look at the man, who for a moment stopped to give an authoritative command to the chauffeur.

It might have been Vernon from the way the man smiled, so wistfully and father-like.

She could hardly restrain herself from running up and looking into his face.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THAT night Marcy sat in a rocker by the window and wept all night. Her soul flooded with despair; she felt it of no use to live on. However, toward morning, a ray of hope did inject itself into her mired senses. And then in a careless distorted scrawl made even worse by the dim, early light coming into the room, she wrote:

"DEAR LEONARD:

"I know it's all over between us. But I just must see you—about something. I'll not beg you to come back for good. But please, please, come this time. I can't tell you what it will mean to me.

"Sincerely your friend,
"MARCY."

Only after she had posted it at the corner mailbox and returned to the leather rocker, could she doze off into sleep.

. . . It was about seven o'clock the next evening that Marcy heard some one fumbling at the bell, and ran to the front window. Vernon was standing there, his finger pressing on the electric button. The thought stifled her that for the first time he was not using his key. However, she controlled herself and walked into the hall and opened the door for him.

Vernon came in slowly, studied her silent gaze at him and then walked into the front room. At first she could

not follow him, but when he sat in a chair, in fact the same rocker where she kept her all-day vigil, she went in.

He looked up. "How are you getting along?" he asked.

His speech eased a little the tension between them. But Marcy could think of no answer until she saw the soft brown hat he was turning between his fingers. Then she reached down, saying, "Won't you let me take your hat? You—can stay a while, can't you?"

When she walked into the hall, Vernon could not keep his eyes from following her. Her little figure was still as trim and straight as ever. He felt a little eased with the idea that perhaps she had not suffered so much after all.

Then Marcy came into the room again. In the hall she had taken a hasty glance at the mirror and prayed that the tears would stay back, so he would see that she wanted to be reasonable and did not want to worry him.

She found him looking about the room, as if he were in some strange place when she came back. She felt like crying out: "I suppose you recognise—things—Lennie!" but held herself.

For some time there was silence. Then he broke in restrainedly: "You said in your note that there was something you wanted to see me about."

She looked down at the small rug in front of the grate. He had plunged into the question without giving her notice.

At last she muttered: "Well, I—I am, oh, terribly unhappy. I guess you know that."

"I thought you said you'd be sensible!" he exclaimed. He even allowed a little anger to creep into his words. After all, did she think he thought her happy? And he knew he must not pity her. Pity—pity—that was what

ruined so many men. And since they had gone contrary to convention—one at least had to suffer. He reflected that that was better than both suffering.

Looking at her trembling fingers which were twisting frantically at a small veil of a handkerchief, he said:

"Now Marcy, it's no use for us to go over the whole thing again. If there's anything I can do to make you happy—why just don't hesitate to ask. You know I don't want to see you unhappy, don't you?"

She smiled, and after a time gave a queer broken laugh. "Then you don't want to see me unhappy?"

"Of course not; you're too sweet and good."

"You think so?"

"You know I do."

"Well——" she hung on to the word before plunging ahead. "Well, then, do something for me—to help me—to keep me from being so terribly lonely."

Her actions were really puzzling. But Vernon made up his mind to go directly to the point. Beating about the bush might break open some hornet's nest of sentimentality. He asked rather sternly: "What do you want, Marcy? More money?"

She turned away. "Oh, not money. What does money mean?"

"Then what do you want?"

She seemed to be undergoing a struggle. He could see how the words were unable to form themselves. Suddenly she drew her handkerchief to her face and sobbed:

"I—I want a baby, Leonard." Then by a mighty effort she controlled herself and looked squarely at him. "Oh, Lennie, if I had a baby I wouldn't be so lonely, and I could think of you—without you—having to bother about it."

He jumped from his chair and stared hard at her. At the moment, he wondered if some one had been advising her. Yes, it was surely that, he saw, for her own brain was too feeble, too honest, perhaps, to conceive such a scheme.

He shouted, glaring at her, "What's your game, Marcy?"

Only as a tremor encompassed her, horrible in its attack, did he realise that from her this was neither intrigue nor cunning. He knew her nature well enough for that.

So he went on more quietly, more gently, reflecting that he must argue with her and get her to see how ridiculous was her quest.

"Why, Marcy, child, you must think about what you're saying. You're free now. You can do anything you want to do. Anything you feel like. I'll see that you have money enough. You know that. You can go down to Atlantic City—any place, but if you had a child——" he broke off imploringly, "Oh, Marcy, don't be so foolish!"

She began to sob now slowly but without much control.

"But, Lennie, I don't want to be free. That's just it. I want something to own, to have to take care of—to be with me all the time. I want something to protect. Now, it makes no difference whether I am dead or alive. And," she hesitated, "I am afraid to go on like that."

For just a moment Vernon weakened. It was a strain to see her beg and cry like this. Then she really would give him no trouble. Her love for him would always protect him from that. And how beautiful and soft was her little body. Good God, it wasn't easy! But supposing—supposing—he married again, as he intended to—some day, what then? Yes; then he would have to suffer years of worry and trouble for just a moment of weakness and sentiment. Like everybody else.

He cried out:

"No, Marcy, life's too rotten a business for anything like that. You don't understand."

The aridity of his soul she could not understand, however. Arising from the floor she clutched at his coat collar and arms.

"Listen, Lennie, please, please"—she could see how he was trying to shut his senses against her plea—"Can't you realise what it will mean? You want to be free. But I don't. And this will take care of both of us. Lennie, please—please think—my way, won't you?"

Even as he angrily tore away from her, she grasped his hand and kissed it imploringly. But he exclaimed angrily:

"Good God! You don't seem to have the least sense about life or anything else. You've been reading stories, I guess. But in real life—things like that—aren't done." He took hold of her arms, embraced her in front of him. "Now for God's sake try to be a sensible little girl. And don't make it so hard for me."

He walked out into the hall. Her tears and her beautiful pale face were beginning to have their effect on him. But he saw a whole train of unhappiness stretching over the years if he gave in now.

In the hall he waited a moment for her to follow. When she did not come after him he walked back into the room again, to where she was standing like some inanimate figure of wax.

"Marcy," he said, "maybe I ought to make it a hundred and a quarter. That'll be six thousand dollars a year. What do you say?"

He studied for the effect of his words. And then when she continued her frozen stare ahead of her, he said cas-

ually, deeming it best to leave her with this last thought on her memory, "Now think about it—and brace up."

. . . . . .

When the door shut after him, Marcy sank onto the floor near the divan and for hours lay numb, inert.

She was crushed completely.

All the frightful force of love's demands, of heart disillusion—the ferment of passion and compassion, battling—all crushed in at the flimsy husk that had sheltered her, overwhelming her with a withering cross-fire of realisation.

Near midnight, however, a strange thing happened. Suddenly the bitter suffering was erased, swept from her mind as by some magic broom; when she uttered terrible words of self-condemnation, the words were devoid of meaning; when she repeated over and over words of pity for her unhappy plight, they were meaningless—like the animated puppets of a marionette play that move and talk but are propelled by some hidden unseen force.

The stupor passed off completely and other thoughts came to her—thoughts so distinct they almost had form. She shrank back, not frightened but happy, pleased,—for the thoughts seemed to take form and stand in front of her, beckoning with outstretched arms and dulcet voices.

And Marcy rose from the floor, and, dazed, yet with an infinite content soothing her heart, walked out of the house and to the drugstore at the end of the block.

. . . When she came back to her bedroom she walked firmly over to the mantel, placed on it what she had bought at the drugstore and then took off her hat and coat.

For a time she sat at the window and then groped her

way over to the writing desk and took out a few sheets of paper.

It took some effort to get the pen to the blank sheet before her:

"I guess I'll go now. It's not terrible and I'm not unhappy at all. I just feel glad, honestly I do. I used to want to be happy in a different way. I used to think when I looked at the birds sitting up in the trees in front of our house that when I grew up I'd just fly any place I wanted to and sing all the time. I guess my wings are cut, though.

"Anyway I'm not sad now. Honestly I'm not."

Marcy stopped her writing. Her heart was too full to give expression to words. She could only look out through the window.

It was one of those moonless nights that absorbs and yet crystallises thought.

A mist, full of rainbow colours but impenetrable, began to shroud everything.

"How wonderful it is!" she thought. "How wonderful!"

She relaxed utterly. Joyful tears trickled down from her closed lids.

She saw a little girl looking at birds.

Then there spread in front of her a wide expanse of fields, dancing gaily in a dazzling sunlight. The flash of sun on the horizon even blinded her—but it drew her, too . . . Eternal happiness . . . there . . . eternal sunshine.

"I'm coming now," said Marcy.

She rose and walked over to the bottle she had purchased at the drugstore.

CHAPTER XXXIV

REMORSE filled Vernon from the moment he left Marcy's side. All night she stood before his eyes, a beautiful, sensitive, tender-hearted child, begging him to be kind to her. He tried to do several things to get her off his mind. He called up Edna Mason at the Pranton. He bought tickets for a musical comedy at the Globe, and then at the last minute called her up and told her business had detained him. Then deciding that he had best go anyway, and had only wanted to be alone, he took a taxi to the theatre, and was already in the orange lighted lobby when he realised he couldn't go in. He ended up by going to his apartment and sitting rigidly in a chair at the window and looking down on to Broadway till all the signs had closed their blinking messages for the night.

. . . . . .

It was at about five o'clock the next afternoon that he received a telephone message from Mrs. Ranier.

"The woman wants to talk to you on private business," the operator said. When he was connected a tremulous, sobbing voice cried:

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, I am very nervous about Mrs.—the —Mrs.—yes, she confided in me. This is Mrs. Ranier who lives across the hall. I've tried to be a friend to the poor little girl. But you'd better come right away. I've knocked on the door a dozen times and can't get any answer. She ran out about noon time and I saw her come in. I know she hasn't left the house since."

In less than fifteen minutes Vernon was standing at Marcy's door, hysterically shaking the knob and knocking, with Mrs. Ranier, in a soft blue dressing robe, crying at his side and holding on to his arm.

"Why, she couldn't have harmed herself," cried Vernon. "My darling little girl."

His face was white, nearly grey, the pupils of his eyes were large and staring, his mouth infirm and drooping at the corners. At once he seemed to have grown ten years older.

At last, with a hysterical shove, he threw his whole weight against the door and it gave way.

Marcy lay on the floor in the dark room. Her legs were drawn up and twisted; her arms outstretched in a rigid curve; every feature of her face distorted by the same sinister instrument.

On the floor lay an empty bottle with a red label.

Vernon suddenly stooped down, took the dead body in his arms and in a hoarse voice that was more of an imploring wail, cried at the lifeless eyes and mouth:

"What have you done—my little Marcy—my love—my sweetheart—my whole life!"

He went on that way for a long time, until Mrs. Ranier, fearing he would lose his mind, stopped him, and gently led him across the hall into her apartment and placed him on the sofa in the front room.

"You must think of yourself a little," she said tenderly.

CHAPTER XXXV

LEONARD left Mrs. Ranier's apartment at five o'clock in the morning. All night he mourned his loss. His suffering was intense and the little woman did all she could think of to ease him. She told him how it was only Fate that had control of life, and that he mustn't think he was to blame.

But he only threw out his arms and in one outburst after another of hysterical remorse, cried:

"Oh, my poor little darling—my little darling—if I had only known!"

And then he would moan for some time after—"She's gone from me. Oh, what will I do?"

Never in all the days of Marcy's pathetically short life had he recognised the wealth of beauty in soul and body that he saw now was taken from him forever.

When Mrs. Ranier pushed him out into the street, after he had mumbled that they must meet again, Leonard felt as if he were stepping out into a world that held forth nothing but emptiness. The little middle-aged woman's affectionate solacing had only been another horror.

It was a clear morning, just between night and day when the darkness was creeping down the long street, like some frightened marauder. Without fog or dampness, there was still a wet glistening surface on the roofs and pavements, left over from a fine, thin rain that had fallen during the night.

For some time he stood in front of the apartment looking toward the river, lost in a dull stupor.

Then a taxi-cab darted into the street from Riverside Drive and he stopped it and got inside. When the driver opened the door before starting and questioned him, it took some time for him to understand what was wanted. Then he said:

"Go on—go on—anywhere."

The man leaned back on his seat with the evident understanding that he would have trouble with his fare, while Leonard sat back into the corner, crushing against the cushions, inert and feebly trying to shut out all the agonising thoughts that flew to his mind.

But as the rattling vehicle swung along, disjointedly, he couldn't keep from reviewing the entire situation.

It was all somewhat hazy though he could peer into the future well enough to see its outlines—as one views a statue through a cloth covering.

And all he could see was future loneliness.

Visions of to-morrow confronted him relentlessly, like wax figures endowed with life, parading before his imagination.

Again and again he thought:

"Oh, why didn't I know? I can't live without her."

Then the chauffeur turned and swung down Broadway, which was now beginning to take on again its early-morning life. And mechanically Vernon looked out of the cab window and began reading the signs:

"JOHNSON AND MATTHEWS, Florists," "I. MAYER, Clothier and Men's Furnishings," "THE JEWEL CANDY STORE."

He remembered how Marcy had looked up into his eyes and begged him to be kind to her.

A man groped his way out of an apartment house, drunk, walked a few steps, than sunk down into a vestibule.

"At least he doesn't know what's happening," thought Leonard. "And I do. Oh, my God, I do!"

Why was it that people could get drunk, carouse, steal, cheat—mistreat life brutally and yet never bring any suffering on themselves; while he, so careful to do what was always honest and fair, was continually suffering loss and disappointment?

CHAPTER XXXVI

LEONARD came onto many new philosophies during the next days, seeking out all who would listen to him and his story of woe and misfortune. And he was surprised, indeed, to realise how unsympathetic people were and how little they took his troubles to heart, after they had rid themselves of their own particular worriment and ideas about life.

For the first time in his life, he found, with surprise, that nearly every one had some kind of faith or creed that pacified them and gave them strength to go on.

And at last, over a week after Marcy's death, he came to believe, mostly through a man he had been referred to by a customer from Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and partly by reading, that one thing was definite and certain. It was this: His happiness in life had been at the mercy of another. He had been a slave. And God had created man to be his own master.

After that came another problem which he pondered over continually at the office or in his new rooms at the Claridge.

God! Who—what—was God?

Which took him some few days of further analysis and delving. And he wouldn't let up. Somehow he found that a definite understanding of life was necessary before he could go on. Otherwise the futility of his trying to live was too apparent.

Strangely he had always talked about God, and felt he

must do right because God was watching. Yet he had never questioned what God meant or was—until now. Of course times were too modern to think of accepting the religious interpretation of his mother. That was too old-fashioned and lacking in modern development.

It was really bewildering. As the man had said, God was back of everything. Of course there was proof of creation all about—flowers, forests, people. And every one talked of God and felt that on Him depended their life. There must be a God who watched over him; perhaps who knew his suffering. Perhaps it was as the man had said—"God is a principle—the first principle of life."

And there he stopped, for a few more days.

If God was the principle of life, the scheme of creation, why had he been allowed to suffer so and make so many mistakes? He began to believe a little more what had been told him. The truth was that he was created by this principle, and had not accepted its creed. He, in himself, was the perfect thing—since God had made him perfect, made him in His own image. He could only control the one perfect being then—his own. He, himself, was God, and perfect unto himself. And he could do no wrong—unless he worshipped—some other god—some other being than his own. One could only control one's own life. And he had tried to control another's. She, or her mind, which was the only perfection—he had worshipped, and tried to control. While all the time she was living in her own world. They really had nothing to do with each other.

Thoughts like this came to be part of Vernon's days now. He saw he must solve the riddle before life would ever again have value for him.

Then came another stumbling block.

He had been happy with Marcy. And suddenly this was all taken away from him, when he had wanted it otherwise. Was it really as the man had told him—that he had been allowing himself to be at the mercy of the physical, the material—which had no life?

Had God seen fit to prove to him that he, Leonard Vernon, was really idolatrous, worshipping false gods, when he should have been worshipping himself?

The man who told him this had a long, thin face, but as he talked his eyes lit up and his countenance became wreathed in a peaceful smile. And he seemed to have proof for everything he said and was so emphatic about it.

Vernon sought him out again. In fact he could hardly wait till the elevator let him off at the twelfth floor in the building where the man had his little office and gave lessons in "Mental Healing."

"I was just passing," said Leonard, "and thought I would drop in and pay you a little visit."

He was motioned to a seat and there seemed real joy on the man's face as he said: "I'm so glad you've come. I've been thinking a lot about you." Then he added, "You're looking much better, too."

"Yes—I—I believe I am—getting hold of something. I seem to feel—that there is a sort of—background to life that I never felt before."

The man's eyes fired again. "Fine!" came the exclamation. Then he handed Leonard a Bible and asked him to read a passage on one of its pages. As if to give more significance to the act, he sat back while Leonard was allowed to find the page for himself.

And Leonard read therein how one must not worship false gods, or the physical manifestations that trod the earth's soil. Somehow the truth of what had been troub-

ling him was revealed. And the words he read were a direct explanation of what God was. God was—as he had been told before—the Spirit of him—Leonard Vernon. Leonard Vernon—in spirit—was God.

They talked for over an hour in the little office-like room. When Leonard rose to leave the man said:

"My friend, you've been trying to run your own life. Now, why not accept what is the only perfect truth and be happy?"

Leonard felt much better and happier as he shot down with the elevator and out into the sunlight of Fifth Avenue. He saw that he or rather the spirit of himself was a perfect thing wrought by an All-knowing and wise Principle that could make nothing wrong. Therefore, he could do no wrong. Hereafter he would renounce all allegiance to the physical expression of things—just know that he was part of the great Principle that gave and governed all life and be satisfied. Yes, he *was* learning—at forty.

But what difference did age make, if it were only the spirit—the mental life that was important? One could shrink up from age and still be young and content—if the mind did not go worshipping other creeds—seeking in physical forests where it would be lost and had no business to wander. What the mind wanted, the mind could have.

That was easy.

Since it regulated its own dreams.

To thought, all manner of thought was possible, since one only had to think to obtain. And he had gone for years hoping that Chance and Opportunity and Circumstance would fix things so he could be happy. When it was all within his power in the instant.

How truly wonderful! A life organised in such a manner could have no mishap or misery.

What fools people were, anyway—worshipping youth or the material expression of youth—when youth dried up and died. Of course he had been worshipping a false god. He had been an idolater. *He should have worshipped himself.* He and God were one.

So Leonard Vernon grew more cheerful. With his new understanding he began to eat again and sleep and go to the office and to the theatre and talk to Whittimore about the business.

And he did not want to go out in the company of others.

He was such good company for himself, now. Always he had something to think about and work out—a delightful companion for himself.

He had never been able to do this before in all his life.

He had always been dependent upon others—Jennie, Mabel—Marcy.

What a fool he had been!

One evening, just as they were leaving the office, he told Whittimore about his theories. He related, too, what conclusions he had come to, and how he was no longer obedient to the capriciousness of chance. He told how he ruled his days now, his desires, his destiny. And how easy it was, all resting simply in one's mental understanding of what life really was. "You know," he said, "now, I understand what has been wrong with me my whole life."

But Whittimore, he found, obtained his happiness by a process of simplification, or elimination, which could never satisfy any thinking person. That was more like a child's way of life—without the labor of philosophy. And he told Vernon that *his* search was like people who never

hunted for facts, but always for some confirmation of a prejudice.

"You are like I used to be, Vernon," he said. "It took me a long time to discover that I was only mimicking life, believing myself intelligent about things, when in reality I was only thinking that I thought. I was a fake philosopher." He laughed as if he were ashamed of his past stupidity, then went on: "And of course the sad part of it all was that whenever I blundered, I had to pay the same price as the vicious. Yes," he went on, "I, like you, had the wrong idea. I had the bachelor's fear of making things fixed. I was always sounding the depths of my affections. I used to look at love as if it were a sort of ocean into which I could dive and get that wonderful afterglow—peace, contentment, thrilling happiness."

Leonard became eager to have him go on. "How about now?" he asked.

"Well, I've since found out that love is a sort of tabernacle, where you house your thoughts—a roof over your head if you are willing to live under it. You don't exult, but neither are you exposed to the elements." Looking at Vernon, he pointed out: "Maybe that's your trouble. You never want to go inside and you don't want to stay outside."

"I've been inside all my life. That's the trouble," Leonard objected.

Whittimore smiled. "Maybe that's been your trouble. When you do go inside, you leave the door open, so you can get out quickly. And the elements get you just the same. You see what I mean?" he asked.

While Leonard listened earnestly, Whittimore went on to tell him that all this analysing was a mistake.

"You see, you have to work too hard to get anything,"

he said. "I'm not going to bother my head with all this figuring out what life means. I used to be that way and I learned my lesson. It's no use."

Vernon interjected: "You don't know what a revelation it is, Whittimore!"

"My God! I'm afraid there *is* some sort of after-life. And if there is, I certainly don't want to learn about it in this existence. Think what a contemplation that would be—having to live all over again what we've been through once."

"You're making fun of it," Vernon exclaimed restlessly. "You don't understand."

"I believe I understand enough. It's no use to be serious over anything except the very little things. And they don't matter. The big things are too big to be serious over, and beyond *any* control of ours, anyway. So worrying about them would make no difference. That's my philosophy. All I want to be is happy."

"But that's all I want, too. Only I can't accept anything so ignorantly."

It was Whittimore's turn to look at his friend in a surprised way: "Now, just what difference can it make?" he argued. "We both arrive at the same result—contentment. And you have to work so hard for it." Then another thought came to him. "And I can have so much more fun than you can, too, Vernon." There was a sly sparkle in his eyes. "You see, women are pretty good company. Now, with all this—this self-abnegation of yours, you'll have to cut them out, won't you? Or else see them without any emotion, whatever—which would be just lying to yourself and absolutely physical then."

There was a long silence. At last Vernon faltered: "Well, you're not telling me anything new. I've been a

slave to the material all my life. And it never was the complete thing for me."

However, it was an angle that required investigation. If he were true to his new understanding, then being with the opposite sex would and could never mean anything more to him. He would have to go through life without that sort of emotion—the emotion that comes of love, physical love. In other words he must never recognise material beauty any more. That would not be easy. What else was there to be interested in?

What would life mean—living like that? Emotion and life were synonymous.

He must find some other philosophy—something which could have the spiritual in it and yet permit the recognition of the material beauty on earth. That's what beauty was put on earth for.

And so Leonard came on to many more theories and schemes of life. It became a habit with him to entice others into conversation along these lines. He ran the gamut from the elevator man to the stenographer.

All had been disappointed in some way or another, and yet were living on.

And more and more he found how wrong he had been to think that one could go on just living without examining the facts of life. He always had been content to know that there was some sort of explanation of life which took care of itself. He had felt that to stay on the safe side was simply a question of not doing a wrong that could be pointed out to his own conscience. He must always escape suffering the retribution in mental agony that comes to the guilty. He remembered now how many times he had hesitated to do what seemed wrong, until he had found a reason that he could explain to his own mind for so doing.

Anyhow, everybody seemed to join one or another of these armies of life-analysers at their first disappointment.

Some days later, the chemist from the Hastings factory came in and lunched with him at the Astor. It took Vernon no longer than fifteen minutes after the waiter had taken their order, to get at the theories of his spectacled-eyed employee.

"You see, Mr. Vernon, we have a theory of anti-bodies, like the proven theory of anti-toxins, now haven't we? Well, just so is there a scheme of anti-souls—where everybody is a being waiting for its other being, or rather soul, to make it complete. In other words, one can only become a complete entity through its soul finding its other half." He explained further that it took tremendous understanding on the spiritual plane to unite these anti-souls and fix them forever after.

The conversation lasted until four o'clock in the afternoon, and the little man went to a bewildering depth into all the things that had so worried Leonard.

"There is an after life and a before life on earth," he said. "Or, better, there is no death. And no one could ever stay departed unless we were not matched with them in soul-spirit and did not seek them after the death of their material bodies." It was amazing indeed.

There was a scheme of reincarnation, Leonard learned, definitely proven, which he had heard so much about and paid so little attention to. But it was a fact that he, Leonard Vernon, the millionaire, had had a previous life and pleasures and sorrows utterly away from the glass industry. And he would never really die.

"Why, Mr. Vernon," the man went on seriously, "you can disassociate yourself if you want, from all this ma-

terial life, and become a spectator away and above this earthly turmoil."

"Where do these people live?" Leonard asked. It seemed he had caught the man at his own game.

"There are spiritual cities in amongst our own cities, where the highest development of vibration is reached—cities peopled with these spirit persons above and through New York and Chicago and Philadelphia. It is only the developed seekers, however, who have communion with them, people who have attained the secret of vibrating in communion with these spirits."

The little man ended up by saying in a very authoritative manner:

"I want to tell you, Mr. Vernon, that sooner or later the world will accept this new idea. They will learn why geniuses are born and why others are stupid. And they will not be so scared of this horrifying physical life. It is surely destined to be the great idea of this century, even as the idea of evolution transformed the conceptions of the last century. If this re-birth of the soul is not a vital truth, then the idea of reincarnation could not have endured for so many thousands of years, and attracted and held some seven hundred millions of human beings. I know," he went on, "it won't be so long before we accept this truth just as we do now the law of gravity."

And then he spoke in phrases that left Leonard completely at sea. He told how the Christian Master approached the ancient city of Cæsarea Philippi, in Palestine, nestling on the slopes of Mount Hermon, and asked the disciples if they knew who He was. And He had asked this because His disciples had thought Him so many different persons—John the Baptist, who had been beheaded, Jeremiah, Elias, and others.

Then came legends sung in the Sagas of the Northmen and spread with the legends of the Gauls; the mystic lore of the Druids; stories of the Gnostics, the Neo-Platonists.

Leonard could hardly get away from him.

But somehow Leonard left him with a feeling that the anti-body, somehow or other, had a certain value, if not exactly in the manner presented to him.

Wasn't it true that people, men and women, were only really complete individuals, mentally and physically, when they found their mates?

Look at himself!

Wasn't he only really half a being?

And hadn't he been searching all his life—for his other half? Without knowing it, he had been at the secret of his trouble for years. Companionship and sympathy was life. And that could only come—from some one else—the anti-soul. People who were then happily completed did not have to seek any longer. They were finished with their work. They were content, which proved the fact.

The natural law was right and helped to prove this, too. God had given sex these halves and given each an individual beauty, attractive to the other half. He had been right in sensing all his life the fact that his other part was contained in the soul of some beautiful young woman. And he had been wanting to fool himself by making this a product of his imagination when the thing was really—tangible—so far as a soul could be.

All this deduction took place in Leonard's mind on the evening of the Tuesday that he had lunched with his chemist.

Until Friday, Leonard spent the time in talking to others, as if he believed one or all of these different

schemes, as if he had fathomed the mysteries of this spiritual life.

Also, he noticed that talking about these psychic mysteries gave him a certain degree of importance.

Until Friday came, when thoughts of Marcy and how near she had come to completing his life, troubled him more than ever. Through the columns of "The World," he sought out a spiritualistic healer, Madame Eloise, who held forth on Seventh Avenue near Forty-seventh Street. He read that hers was the power to dip into the spiritual cities and bring out the lost one in thought and voice. But his determination faltered as he wended his way through a long narrow hall that went back for a hundred feet or more before a series of steps led him to the "Healer's" residence.

It was a weird few minutes for him. Immediately on entering the stuffy room, he became hot and nervous. There was hardly a vacant space where his eyes could rest. Faded pictures of saints, painted upon parched-looking deerskins, crowded upon figures laboriously wrought in wood that pictured the crucified Nazarene, and votive offerings in dull, tarnished silver were spread out carelessly on a tapestry-covered table before an indentation in the wall masquerading as a shrine.

He held on to his seat in the dimly lighted room until the Madame entered, a fat waddling woman with a strangely bored expression on her face.

Then he was about to rise, but the woman stopped him, saying:

"A little coloured girl named Nanny will put us in communion with 'the other side.'"

Leonard's throat burned with dryness as he at last admitted that he would like to speak with Marcy.

It seemed only an instant when a thin piping voice said:

"Everything is well and I am happy and always with you."

With a cold perspiration blinding him, Leonard threw a bill to the woman and ran from the place.

After that Leonard closed his mind to the whole tribe of esoteric cult that had touched him—astrological, Rosicrucian, spiritualistic, neo-alchemy.

Of what good was it, even if true, to converse with Marcy in spirit, when he would give ten years of his life to be able just to kiss her wonderful lips?

He was lonelier than ever. And filled with regret.

He had really learned too much about the mysteries of life.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A MONTH after Marcy's death, Vernon obliged Whittimore by calling up Edna Mason, who for over two weeks had been entertaining Mrs. Bellamy and her beautiful daughter, Charline.

He had himself well in hand, too. Deep in him he felt that here perhaps was the fate awaiting him that he had pictured. However, it was not easy to subdue the memory of Marcy. He reflected continuously, as he went up in the mirrored elevator, how she had been with him on his last visit.

Miss Mason greeted him warmly and then introduced him to Mrs. Bellamy, whom he found as a charming, sympathetic woman, somewhere near forty. From the moment he took her hand, this woman, so kind and gracious, an ideal sort of mother, beamed on him, and he saw that she liked and admired him.

But Charline attracted him from the moment she came in the room. A tall, fair, beautiful young girl, with all the full development of Marcy and hair of the most lustrous golden brown he had ever seen. The moment he touched her gentle flesh, he saw that she was the waiting one—there was a tightening of the fibres of his heart—strange spasms shot through him holding him taut.

It was only when they sat down and indulged in conversation which he could hardly follow for looking at her, that he saw that her eyes were not quite as soft and gentle in their message as were Marcy's, but were every bit as inviting.

She was very friendly, too. In fact, all three women seemed bent on being kind to him.

"I just ran over," said Leonard, with a sweeping glance, that started and finished with Charline, "to see Miss Mason's charming visitors."

Though Edna disappointed him a little when she said to Mrs. Bellamy:

"I've so wanted Mr. Vernon to meet you, Dehlia. He is New York's most charming man."

But they talked on through a variety of subjects that never wandered very far from polite commonplaceness, until Leonard saw that it would be clever to abruptly leave.

So he shook hands, first with Edna and then with Mrs. Bellamy. When he took the hand of Charline he looked deep in her eyes. It took all the manacles of his experience to make him understand that silence was far better at the moment than the sweetest greeting he could give her.

He left the apartment, feeling as if the world had suddenly offered to him the prize he had waited for.

When he entered his bath before dinner he was more alive and had a wealth of vitality and energy that bewildered him. When he closed his bathroom door the sensation of being so fresh and supple went to his head. He was like an athlete who had just finished some victorious race. He stripped off his clothes, taking dance steps as he undressed.

It was as if this Charline would dramatise for him all the ambitions of his lost youth. He was flooded with the ecstasy of it.

Deciding that he would choose Delmonico's, rather than stay at the Claridge, he finished his dressing and

walked up to Forty-fifth Street. It was delicious even to walk, and he swung along buoyantly, young, fluttering with anticipated emotion.

At Fifth Avenue, he stopped before crossing just to drink in the glory of it all. Everything had an unnatural attractiveness. The fading daylight had a softness, as it lit up the streets and windows, as if it had been filtered through soft glass, and was caressing only its favourites. Everybody that passed him had a luminous joy in their eyes.

How different the past seemed, too. Now he could look at all the past—misfortunes, as one peers through the small end of an opera-glass. The importance of things that formerly had so controlled him, he could now shove away, until their definiteness, though still with the same detail, was too far away to even bother him again. In fact, he could dare to exteriorise for the first time, a Leonard Vernon free from all barriers to happiness—and much more clever than the old one.

He made his way to the entrance of the restaurant.

But even at dinner he was so ecstatic he could hardly finish his meal.

He reflected over what a beautiful name the child had. Charline. He could already see her as his wife. She had manner, poise, cleverness—everything. And such beauty! And what a wonderful, graceful body!

Over his demi-tasse and on the back of his menu card, oblivious to the orchestra or the people around him, he began a poem that was only finished at two o'clock in the morning, as he paced his room in his pajamas, looking out over the darkened signs of Broadway.

From the multitude of scribbled papers, he made out the following:

"The city lies between us, dear,
Street after street,
And hosts of gray mortar and dull concrete
Separate us, like mountainous walls
Impenetrable.
Yet I find your beauteous face before me.

"The city lies between us, dear,
My eyes o'erlook
A hundred thousand restless, moving things,
Where as many destinies are being woven
By the Mystic Hand.
Yet I find my wandering spirit is at rest."

He was on the point of mailing it when he saw that it would be much more effective if he should read it in a soft, well-modulated voice.

Leonard's sleep that night was the most satisfying he had had in many months. When he awoke in the morning he could not help remarking to himself how fresh he looked and how clear were his eyes. And during the day he took especial care with his appearance. After shaving he used for the first time a dark flesh-coloured talcum, which a druggist had persuaded him gave a more healthy appearance to the skin, and just after lunch, attracted by a sign in a drugstore across from the hotel, he entered and purchased a vial of an imported brilliantine, which "gave the hair a natural and youthful lustre."

He called at the Pranton at tea-time. Edna and Charline, he found, were out for a walk in the park and had not yet returned. However, he held out as long as he could, answering nearly in monosyllables the conversation which Mrs. Bellamy was amazed to find was boring him.

At last he remarked: "I hope Charline—your daughter

—returns before I go. You know, I am quite enamoured with her, Mrs. Bellamy."

Indeed, he was disappointed to find this did not bring her the pleasure he anticipated. Somehow he noticed a queer drooping of the woman's eyes and mouth as she replied: "Yes, Charline is an unusual little person."

"I am sure she is," he added exultantly, so that she would be sure beyond a doubt of his feelings.

Then, in the hall, came a slamming of the elevator door and Charline, enveloped in a long blue coat thrown about her shoulders in military fashion, came in with Edna.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Vernon?" she said cordially.

And life was again worth the living. The sparkle in her eyes seemed to shoot pointed darts of enticement in his direction. Then after a few minutes in an adjoining room, she came in and again sat down by his side, while Mrs. Bellamy with a vague excuse that she must help Edna left the room. Leonard felt the touch of Charline's delicately fragranced person with an intoxication of bliss.

And the bit of poetry was in his inner pocket.

When Charline exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Vernon, we talked about you half the night last night! You've certainly made a hit with mother."

Vernon looked at her, startled. He was unable to keep back the exclamation of his surprise:

"With mother!"

He faltered on: "Why, how old do you think I am?"

She studied him for some time. Out in the kitchen dishes were rattling, intermingling with a rather whispered conversation.

"Well, I guess you are about fifty."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LEONARD VERNON felt sleep impossible that night. Walking on the carpeted floor, he fought all the anguishing thoughts that seemed to have returned with more ardour than ever. He could not help comparing Marcy with the blonde-haired child of the afternoon. And one he found was wise and worldly and clever and irritating, while the other—a gracious gift of God to man—was wholesome and real and lovable. And she was lost to him forever. Never again, as long as he was on earth, would there be that sweetness for him that she had given him. Never again would such eyes look into his eyes, and such lips press against his lips with a message that gave all and asked no return but love.

Life was over for him. There was no use to lie about it to himself. She had been the other part of him and had been taken away. Half of him was dead. The other half must follow. Perhaps they might be united in some other life. But this earthly existence was finished. He would go on seeking, but he would never find.

And as he had done as a boy, Leonard sat down in a chair by the window and leaned his head on his hands while bitter tears filled his eyes and ran down on to his cheeks.

Near early dawn, he resolved upon death.

Life uncompleted had no worth. There was no reason for his existence. Unfinished men like himself had no value on earth.

Soon he would be going around hunting for a kind word.

Leonard became quite tranquil at this new decision. Just deciding to take this step, suddenly offered to him the first relief he had ever known. He could stare out of the windows now and look up Broadway with its lines of piercing street lights without each one seeming a mocking face grinning at his misery.

He decided to kill himself, quietly, as if it were a long-sought-for solution—a noble ending, not pausing to reflect that it would be the end, his eternal farewell to earth and to life.

Then he thought about how he could accomplish it. He quickly rid himself of the idea of a revolver. One had to have a steady hand and take a sort of aim and pull a trigger. It was mechanical.

He thought of poison. But what kind of poison? Carbolic acid might do it. But he had read enough of the agonising death brought by its corrosive action. That was the common way, too. Every one used it.

Good God!

Mabel—Marcy!!

It took him some time to get back to his original idea. Until he found he was getting nervous and must decide on something quickly.

He thought of chloroform. Just that day he had read how a young fellow had managed to kill himself with the anæsthetic. The paper had commented that this was an unusual death—self-asphyxiation by this method. It had been proven nearly impossible—unless the patient had a weak heart. And then the heart collapsed. Otherwise, the article had said, death was impossible because air became mixed with the gas, and it could be carried in no

other way; in fact, the power was lost to do it by muscular numbness, before the thing could be carried through.

He thought about it.

A doctor had told him he had a weak heart, he remembered, some years before. Though at the age of seventeen he had had quite a bloody operation for adenoids under an anæsthetic. And the doctor had told him then that his heart was sound.

Certainly it would be the pleasantest way he could think of.

The matter was settled. He would make out his will in the morning, leaving everything to charity.

The joy of living was in creating and giving—as he had read some place.

Though now he was dying.

Perhaps he should have thought of that before. Perhaps—that was the secret of happiness. Anyway, it was too late now.

He would get a list of hospitals and let his lawyer divide it between them equally. Yes, he had nearly forgotten—Jennie. He would leave her half. It was a nice thing to do, too. About the first time he had ever done anything for her.

Then he would get the chloroform in a drug store and end it all about five o'clock in the afternoon.

It was odd, he reflected, that even death had to have an exact time. At least his business instinct was following right through to the end. Standing in front of the mirror, he could not help but laugh a little about it.

At least he was running his death. He had not had the power to control his life.

Leonard now took off his clothes, quite calmly took a

brush and straightened out the thin long hairs at the crown of his head, put on his pajamas and got into bed.

. . . . . .

At three o'clock in the afternoon Leonard walked up Broadway to the drug store at Forty-sixth Street.

He felt a sort of joy, now that he had actually determined to finish himself. In fact, it was a feeling more like pride than he had ever known. Whittimore and the clerks in the office would talk about how brave he was. They would remark how light-hearted he had seemed in their last words with him. Just as he entered the store the thought came to him that he ought to leave some sort of letter.

This idea pleased him. He could give a few thoughts on life all right. And he really might do some one some good by it.

In the drug store the clerk enquired why he wanted chloroform. He was pleased at the alertness of his mind when he answered casually:

"Why, I really don't know. Our family physician ordered it—for rubbing purposes, I think."

The clerk, a young fellow with blonde pompadour hair and a red necktie, thought for a moment, then went back to the prescription counter and soon returned with a small can, which he wrapped up in front of Leonard.

Leonard walked out strangely happy, as if he had outwitted some one in a business deal.

When he got up in his room he took off his hat and coat and unwrapped the can and placed it on the table in front of him.

He thought:

"Well, Leonard Vernon—to-morrow—this time—you'll be dead."

For the instant a horrible feeling passed over him. Dead! He would never again see any one, or eat, or sleep, or talk!

What power an individual had after all. In an instant he could undo the work of nearly forty years, and the instrument was within everybody's reach all the time! He walked over to the bureau and stood in front of the mirror. He saw how determined his eyes looked. He was really astonished to see what strength was there.

And he reflected on:

"Queer. This is the first time in my life that I have been actually determined on what I want to do. Without asking anybody's advice or consulting them."

He sat down on the edge of the bed. What would people say? Leonard Vernon had committed suicide in his room at a Broadway hotel.

How Jennie would mourn!

Poor Jennie!

A shudder ran through him. He could almost see her cheerful face. After all, *she* had loved him. Perhaps he should have just stayed with her and been content. And commonplace.

But Marcy had proved to him how impossible that would have been.

Certainly his life had been a failure. He was right in knowing when to end it. He had been just an atom put on earth with no purpose in itself. In fact, just half an atom—if such a thing were possible. Had he not needed this other half to make him a completed thing? How clear things were now. Had he found the right woman he would have been happy. But supposing he had. Of what purpose would life have been anyway? He would have had to go on making money just to buy

things that people without money couldn't have. And what good did that do? In fact, what good did any one do in life? What difference was there if any one certain person weren't born? Or were killed after he was born? What difference did it make if a million people were killed, for that matter? Perhaps one or two of them might invent something like the telephone or wireless. But people went on just as well before they had them. Perhaps that was the solution of it. Ignorance! And being happy! Certainly it made no difference whether one lived ten years or seventy years. One was only really first born the day that happiness came. In his youth he had so wanted to be a painter. But what difference would it have made if he had painted some unusual picture? Nobody would have known how unusual it was until some one had said so first. And that one person, if his opinion were accepted, could say it was a bad picture. And then the picture would never be heard of. People were like sheep. Taking other people's opinions and conventions. They were afraid to think for themselves. Then, even if they did think for themselves, it would not be accepted as right unless everybody else thought the same thing. After all—what did anything amount to? Yet every one was so anxious to live! Queer!

Killing one's self was probably the only real accomplishment in life!

At least it was certainly some revenge on the ironic scheme.

Downstairs the orchestra was playing in the restaurant. The noise came up through the shaft of the court. Down there, people were having tea—drinking and eating—looking into each other's eyes and trying to persuade themselves, or at least each other, that they were mates.

If they only knew what he knew about it! Mates were born of some force beyond the control of man.

What fools!

He decided to undress before he wrote the note.

When he had on his dressing-robe, he placed a number of sheets of paper in front of him on the table by the window. Across the way, on a roof, a vast chewing-gum sign began faintly to blink at him, but he soon got this off his mind.

Then the orchestra downstairs began playing again. It was faint and lively. He listened.

It was the motif of Scheherezade.

Poor Marcy!

If only she were here now!

He began to write:

"I don't mean to complain. I used to believe in this life. I wanted so much. I guess I was too unknowing about it. I used to think there was some law—of equality. I—I——"

What a difficult thing it was to write a message to the world. Perhaps it would be better just to leave himself out of it entirely.

Strange! What would people care who or what he was or thought—when he was dead?

He started again:

"None of us ever get what we want. It is inevitable that every one must go on fooling themselves until the end——"

After all, what was there to say? And if he did say something worth while, it would only be the curious who read it. And then they would make fun of him—because *they* were happy and well.

Then who would he address it to anyway? Excepting

Jennie perhaps, or Whittimore? And it would never reach the world that way. Perhaps he could say, "To whom it may concern."

How ridiculous!

Yes, he would just scribble the word: "Farewell."

That said everything and would prove how debonairly he had taken the whole matter.

Leonard scribbled the word "Farewell" across the top of the paper. Then a sort of hysteria overcame him. And he scribbled, "Farewell," "Farewell," a dozen times or more, up and down and across the page.

It was hard for him to quiet himself now. But he at last managed to sit down by the centre table after going into the bathroom and getting a large bath towel. For a time he became silent, indifferent to everything—a feeling that he vainly tried to throw off. With his hands spread out upon his knees, he stared into ghastly emptiness. If he could have reached the thought deeply buried in him, it would have been that he was seeking consolation for the shattered dream in his grief-trammelled soul.

He took the can and opened it. Now there was only one distinct thought in his mind. He was going to die.

When he opened the can a strange, sharp, yet sweet, odour filled the room. He poured it onto the towel until one end of it was saturated. Then he shut his eyes and, leaning back in the rocking chair, placed the towel over his nose and began to inhale, very deeply.

At first this was difficult, as he could not keep from coughing and choking terribly. But at last he became more accustomed to the fumes.

Thoughts began filling his mind with each inhalation, thoughts that told him he must fight against stopping

this breathing with all his strength. But in a moment he felt much better, although it seemed as if all the gas stayed inside of him and pushed out his chest.

Yes, he *was* expanding, most surely.

It was just at the instant when he made up his mind to tear the saturated towel away from his face that the bursting feeling was replaced by a sensation that made him feel much better, much lighter, like an inflated balloon—made him feel more pleasant.

Indeed, he was being carried away now, luxuriously.

What an idea!

His body had filled with this gas and he was floating about the room.

Where would he float?

How people would be startled if he should go out of the window and over Broadway! The papers would have headlines full of it. Why shouldn't he—just let himself do this—for the fun of it?

When Leonard opened his eyes he saw that the towel was on the table and quite dry.

He poured the remainder of the can on to the towel and shut his eyes again. And began to take deep breaths. It was so sweet and pleasant.

By far the sweetest and pleasantest thing he had ever done.

While the people downstairs were sitting and talking about life, he was living it—just happy, tingling, comfortable, soothed. Just as happy as he was as a boy, when he used to whistle in the morning before breakfast.

Perhaps he might whistle now? They couldn't hear him downstairs? Why shouldn't he whistle if he wanted to? What should he whistle? If he wanted to whistle

no one could stop him? He was Leonard Vernon. He'd buy out the whole hotel if they'd stop him.

He had no body at all—just a sensation of wanting to whistle. That was all. Of course, he had legs and arms some place—but they were of no importance. He was too happy to bother about legs and arms now.

But he could think—wonderfully now. He could see everything that had happened since he was a boy.

They were lifting him up on a sort of platform that was floating in the air. Everybody was throwing flowers at him and cheering him and he was bowing to them for the homage they paid him. How they appreciated him and understood what a big man he was and how he had suffered.

Somehow he was a great man. Which the people seemed to know all about. They couldn't be making any mistake.

Suddenly there was vagueness . . . nothing. He opened his eyes. There was a table in front of him and—the towel on the floor.

So he was not dead yet!

But very comfortable! And there was a sweet numb feeling all over him. His hands were in front of him on the table. They looked like the hands of some one else—funny-looking and large and white.

What a strange object a hand was anyway! And people wore them.

Funny!

It made him laugh!

So he was not yet dead?

Why should he die?

What had made him want to die?

If he could feel like this he would want to live forever. One could have so much fun!

There was Mrs. Ranier, for instance. Why hadn't he thought of her before he made up his mind to die? She was charming-looking and had such a cute nose and such round laughing eyes—a really delightful little person. And she liked him too. And understood him. And knew how he had struggled. And she knew how stupid were all the institutions of life like marriage. She had told him that with her eyes when—Marcy died.

No—no bad thoughts now—just happiness.

He must call her on the 'phone—if it wasn't too late.

Somehow Leonard managed to grope his way to the telephone and talk into the hollow black mouth of the transmitter.

"Give me——"

It was all so vague—where she lived. Then he remembered the apartment house.

"You must get this party on the 'phone—for me—a Mrs. Ran-ier," he called to the hotel central. He gave her the apartment house number and the street.

He was so deliciously weak and there seemed to be many white-faced, hollow-eyed Leonard Vernons in the mirror of the dressing-table opposite him.

Strangely, it took hardly a second for the call. He wondered why everything happened so quickly.

"You think of something and it happens," he reflected.

He put the receiver to his ear.

"I—I—" he faltered, "I would like to call on you, my —dear Mrs. Ranier. I'm feeling pretty fine this evening."

But how unfortunate. She could only see him for a half hour, though there were other evenings. "A Mr.

Weinstein"—perhaps he had heard of him, he was a very successful jewelry importer from Chicago—"was in the city." But she was so sorry. "How are you? I've thought so much about you."

Leonard could hardly make out what she said. But it was something about coming for a half hour anyway, and he answered:

"Fine. I'll be there."

To himself he thought aloud, as he caught the receiver on its claw-like hook, "She's a dear little woman."

Then he wondered if she were through talking and he grabbed the receiver again and heard floating into his ear: "How are you? You sound—woozy."

"Oh, fine," he muttered back. "I'll be up in a half hour. Wait for me. Fine."

He remembered what a nice round body she had, and how kind she had been to him—at some time or other.

Leonard Vernon began to dress while songs of abandon ran through his ecstatic mind.

Also he stumbled against the table as he crossed the room.

And in the bathroom, where he went to wash his face and hands, he sank helplessly to his knees in front of the wash-basin.

He was going to live after all.

But—how his mind was clearing!

CHAPTER XXXIX

DISINTEGRATION of what was left of the man, Leonard Vernon, began the moment he regained his senses.

He thought, his hands moved—but there was no cohesion in him. It was more as if his thoughts were only segments of himself—isolated in his brain with no connection or control that he could call on for help.

It was as if he were being resolved into his different elements.

So he hung on to the side of the wash-basin, supporting himself against the white-enamelled surface, like some liquor-besotted individual.

And unto himself he moaned, "Vernon—Vernon"—a pitiable cry of anguish, while the clouds floated away from his mind and revealed to him the horror of his prospective errand.

But the worst horror came when he glimpsed himself in the mirror above the nickel-plated faucets. Then it was that the delicate balance that had maintained itself between his mind and his body was completely severed. He saw a white, pasty, aged face, so transparent that not a drop of blood seemed to course through the flesh.

He sunk down to the floor, possessed by a racking lassitude that destroyed the last vestige of his awakening determination.

It was over an hour before he could resume the interrupted thread of his thoughts.

Though he felt all the time that something ghastly confronted him, which must be put off as long as possible, only gradually could he conceive the significance of it.

He—who somehow had become anxious to live again—had a—rendezvous—with a little pug-nosed woman of middle age.

God in heaven!

For that he had wanted to get back on earth!

Life—God—that had taken so much of his thought—resulting—in what?

Musing on, in a sort of mingled agony of self-loathing and amazement, the while he dragged himself from the bathroom back into the bedroom and into the bathroom again, perhaps a half-dozen times, Leonard began to rebel against the sardonic future beckoning to him.

And then began to shade the eyes of his future from the tragic illumination cast by the powerful light of Fact.

And at last he seated himself by the window and looked down upon the more consoling lights of the city, which were more distant from him.

What should he do? Live or die? Why should he want to live? or die, for that matter?

He sat very quietly, his eyes riveted upon the crowds in miniature below. The question seemed to be echoed from every moving thing. Queerly, after some time, every one seemed to stare up at him, with their eyes gaping big and round, like the Beasts in Revelations.

And then, by barely discernible shifts, there grew in his mind the understanding that it was just as foolish to die as it was to live.

While one had some hand in managing life, they should not tamper with death. That should be left to other

hands who did it for you, in one way or another, without you bothering to exercise your own ingenuity.

. . . It was indeed a period of real understanding, a sort of gifted hour of clairvoyance that really displayed to him the exact status of man in relation to the unsolvable riddle. And in this period of unprecedented lucidity, Leonard Vernon saw as a clear and simple necessity that the human being's only vocation should be to get the most out of the life that was handed him. He saw that it was contrary to the laws of Nature to assume the authority of ending it. In fact, all that God, or the principle, or scheme, demanded was for the human being to be sensible enough not to meddle with things, like death, which didn't concern him. His job was to accept and make the most out of *Life*.

What an idea!

Ninety per cent. of the world's misery would be eliminated if people attended to their own business.

At least, if one didn't concern themselves about it, there would be lost the element of doubt in life. Because one wouldn't doubt so much the things he couldn't control. One only doubted when he didn't know what he was going to do next.

What a fool everybody was! When they could have so much fun!

He found himself talking to himself, with a chuckling laugh:

"How silly! We haven't any right to bother about what doesn't concern us. That's the reason we are made to suffer. We don't attend to our own business. . . ."

It was all so clear, as if the curtain of his life had been drawn and revealed for the first time the advantage

of plain, common sense, which he saw now had never, in all his years, been unveiled.

"Common sense is the *secret* of life," he whispered, and the idea actually seemed to represent the golden key to happiness. Without common sense one wanted things of the imagination, as he had done.

Which meant wanting things he couldn't get!

Then another idea came to him.

Common sense—was the Nirvana to be obtained on the Heavenly Plateau, which understanding had to be reached by suffering. In no other way could one discard illusions. Common sense was no gift that could come with Youth, for instance.

One had to undergo experiences.

As he had.

The life of man upon earth was a process of elimination. Some, the less clever ones, never entirely eliminated imagination from their thoughts, while others, he for instance, gained the heaven of complete elimination of illusions at forty.

He was indeed lucky!

So deciding, Leonard arose and went to the medicine-chest in the bathroom, took down the bottle of whiskey with its leather covering, and poured out a drink that half filled the tumbler.

For years he had been such a fool, always serious and thinking about things.

After which, in a glowing inspiration, he put on his hat and overcoat and went down into the night air of Broadway. The night, above the strata of lighted signs, was dark and starless, the sky was fringed by dripping clouds of drizzle that seemed to mock the blazing streets below it and determined to dampen some of their ardour.

But his elation was growing by the minute, more definite and substantial.

As he walked, he thought:

"My happiness and peace of mind are in my own hands. . . .

"I have learned the Sesame to contentment. . . .

"I have been through the scorching hell of disillusion ment. . . .

"Now I am free! Free!"

Even as he ended his walk at a night restaurant at Forty-ninth Street and very quietly was handing his cane and hat to the boy who blocked his way at the foot of the cushioned stairs ascending to a miniature ballroom, he went on, thinking, over and over: "I've been through hell—I've been through hell!"

No longer was he shivering with self-distrust; no longer was he a living apostrophe to the King of Mercy.

He was emancipated—unmanacled—from the steel grip of every earthly imprisonment.

And this included women. . . .

He entered the arena of pleasure upstairs in an effulgence of self-satisfaction.

His head was erect, his chin lifted, his body straight.

He was the captain of his ship, the master of his soul.

CHAPTER XL

LEONARD was shown his seat, at the edge of the cleared space, in the midst of an encore. Though not without the usual preliminary. The head-waiter, never having seen him before, hesitated about giving even this well-groomed slightly tipsy gentleman such a choice seat. But a bill on Leonard's part and a relenting glance from the waiter, that immediately placed his guest in his proper social niche, completed the transaction of entry.

Leonard adjusted himself at the small table and then quietly ordered a bottle of "Pommery—Simple Sec.," while he cast his eyes onto the cleared waxen space, where a dark-skinned girl with cadaverous face, framed by heavy lustrous black hair, was bowing to the clapping multitude.

Next him shouted a bald, bespectacled individual:

"Encore—encore—Fanchon! Be a good girl!"

Fanchon seemed to know him, too, for she gave him a sidelong glance, then nodded to the orchestra. The cembalo broke into a weird tom-tom melody that reminded Leonard of gipsy caravans journeying across the lonely prairies, the lights went out and she began to dance as a purple and gold shaft of illumination caught the diamond-studded bracelet on her wrist.

She was a favourite, he could easily see, from the way every one hung on to her rhythmic gyrations. Every one watched her. Looking about the room, Leonard could see how the eyes of every one followed her, older men, men much older than he, over-developed young girls, yet

deep in their teens, sallow-faced youths with sleepy expressions, other young fellows, college youths perhaps, with round cheeks untarnished by dissipation and eyes shining with unnatural eagerness.

Then from out of the darkness came a tall thin youth, who turned and twisted her to the end of the dance, till it seemed that both must stop, faint for the want of breath.

At last it was over. Fanchon threw a kiss to the crowd, the jewelled band round her thin wrist caught the light and sparkled like dots of fire, a jaded girl with a thin blue dress and dark purplish rings of dissipation under her eyes began dancing cheek to cheek with one of the sallow-faced youths in evening dress, the tired musicians tried to mop their perspiring heads and helped themselves to the ice-water, poured out for them from a cut-glass water-pitcher by the drummer, who was at leisure.

Nor was Leonard's mind unaffected by this rollicking scheme of desire and exotic idling. He had caught the close proximity of the dancers' bodies, had caught the vehemence of Fanchon's unnatural beauty as she whirled past him. And he was steeped in it, body and soul.

Fanchon came to the table next him, sat down; he saw she was clever-looking, strangely pretty; he caught her eye, beckoned to her; she apologised, arose, and before he knew or could realise it was sipping wine with him and exchanging glances.

"You're a perfectly marvellous dancer," said Leonard.

"Oh, you mustn't, dear boy!"

Her eyes danced tantalisingly.

"But I mean it. Quite the most wonderful dancer I've ever seen."

Her skin, under the orange-coloured light of the table,

had a delicate velvety softness, like the sheen of a heavy pink silk.

Then he became more earnest and sympathetic.

"It must be tiring, dancing like this every night. Don't you get worn out from it?"

He was indeed lucky to have her so long. Every one must have envied him.

And immediately he noticed a deepening of the shaded circles under her eyes. Her voice lost its fictitious note of cheer.

"I do get tired—so tired. The people are so—so commonplace and—" she seemed to be studying him, wonderingly, "the men are all—so alike." Looking back at the table she had just left, she added: "Him, for instance—here every night—out chicken hunting—looking for some young girl to make him young again—one of New York's tired business-men! Oh, they make me so sick."

A breath of companionship for her came from Vernon's lips:

"Poor little girl."

And what a challenge it was to him. She had discovered in five minutes of conversation that *he* was different.

She had to leave him shortly to prepare for her next dance. But she left Leonard exultant, proud, and glowing again, with warm satisfaction.

After all, he saw, it was only the woman who herself underwent the hard knocks of the world that understood.

. . . For two days thereafter he embarked upon a voyage of courting that left far behind in its wake all memory of past squalls.

The next night he sat by the little round table for four hours, just admiring her.

And the day following he spent four hundred and seventy-five dollars upon a delightful little memory-pin, studded with chipped diamonds and amethysts, which she wore at night when she greeted him and reached over the table and, pressing his hand, murmured:

"You're too good to me, Mr. Vernon. I ought not accept it."

But he beckoned casually to the waiter for a bottle of wine before he answered her.

"It's nothing—just a slight token of my—my esteem —for your art."

She relinquished only slowly, saying:

"It's wonderful of you just the same."

As she spoke he saw her give the heart-shaped clasp a soothing stroke of appreciation.

The following night Leonard danced with her, when a song she sang demanded a partner from the audience. For the first moment he faltered, as her extended arms awaited him. Then he threw to the winds the fear of ridicule. He made his way out through the tables and folded her in his arms in the centre of the floor. And betwixt the fragrance that rose from the perfumed flesh of her bosom, intoxicating him, and the sturdy way she guided him through the dance, his delirium was neither smothered nor even halted.

But a real pang of jealousy shot through him down to his aching, stiffened knees, when she must needs have another partner for the next verse.

However, her sweet whispers would not be repeated to her new partner: "You dear old boy—you danced just lovely—for one who dances so seldom."

Indeed, he followed her closely and saw no evidence of such confidences.

Although the solace offered him was not entirely a heart-stilling one. The partner she selected was fat and pudgy and his red watery eyes were screened by a pair of thick glass spectacles. In fact, he was the pudgy one who had sat next him on the evening of his first entrance into this bedizened gallery.

Leonard sat drinking his Pommery till nearly three o'clock. Then a determination stole into the very heart of him, a startling, revealing spasm of anticipation, that racked his desires into a restless frenzy.

He must take her home. She must sit beside him in his limousine and have her warm presence close to him.

But right at the door she put him off with a shy answer, nearly childish in its awkward refusal.

"To-morrow night—sure," she murmured, with lids cast downward. But her answer bespoke even greater anticipation for the waiting. "I am so sorry—I—I promised one of the girls I'd stay with her. Her husband's away and she's 'fraid."

Leonard went home to his rooms at the Claridge with a slow-beating heart, heavy and sad. As he walked past the shop windows, he rearranged in his mind an apology for her delay in appreciating what he was thrusting at her. Though he did not blame himself. There was enough to fortify him against that at every reflection his tall, well-formed, well-groomed person called forth from the shop windows.

He understood so much more now than formerly. The world would go on just the same. It would have made no difference if he were walking past these windows with a half-dollar piece in his pocket instead of the million or more he could command at the banks. That was the

way of the world. Some day he would be dead and yet these same windows would see saddened men going home, gazing at their reflections.

Everything was set so the world made a fool of you.

If you weren't wise.

His confidence came back entirely when he entered the warm marble lobby of the hotel and the elevator shot him up to his room.

"To-morrow night—this time," he reflected.

The reality of his consummation was very different from anything he had prepared in his mind's journey. On the stroke of eleven the next night he made his way into Fanchon's web of pleasure. He was attired in a close-fitting evening jacket, just arrived from the tailors. He had on his head to cover the bald spot at the crown an "invisible toupee," sleekly concealed by an over-application of the imported brilliantine.

Fanchon spied him as soon as he entered. He saw her rise from the table in a corner where also sat an anæmic-looking youngster of some twenty-one or twenty-two years. She seemed to have glimpsed him when he had hardly entered the door.

"Come," she said, as she reached his side and took hold of his hand, "sit with us for a few minutes. I am so glad to see you."

Perplexed, he followed her through the labyrinth of white-covered tables.

Also he noticed that she was very gay. And when they reached the table in the corner, as the young man rose for an introduction, that her eyes hungrily sought the young fellow's.

"Ralph, I want you to meet Mr. Vernon. You know I told you he was going to be my second papa." Ralph

smiled and reached for Vernon's hesitating fingers with an over-manly greeting.

After which Leonard sat down, slowly, dazed.

They busied themselves in looking about the room, while he murmured to the waiter at his side:

"A large bottle, Pommery—Sec."

But he could see how the boy's eyes were searching Fanchon's.

Then Fanchon's fingers stole across the white cover and held the long lean fingers of the boy, rapturously, passionately.

A picture filtered into the abyss of Leonard's memory, of an old man sitting by a path, while young lovers went dancing by without noticing him.

His companions saw him rise and grope his way from the table.

But it was not until Leonard reached his room that he could realise the manner of Fanchon's betrayal of him.

He was crushed by the irony of it.

"Great God in heaven!" he cried.

As he sat numbly in the leather rocker by the window, the figure of the lovely Marcy came like a relentless spirit and confronted him, for just a fleeting moment.

Then Leonard jumped up, ran into the bathroom, took down the whiskey bottle and gulped two swallows that choked off his breath.

His eyes became blind, his brain swollen with anger and rebellion.

In his struggle to replace the bottle he smashed into uncountable bits the mirror over the wash-stand.

A frenzy overtook him. He stamped on the bits of glass as if each were a miniature monument of mockery which he must crush.

The heavens of his faith, his new philosophy, his confidence, his hopes, came crashing down about him in a great chaos.

He swept up and down the room, stamping, clutching, swearing, crying out hoarsely, until at last he tottered to the bed and flung himself across the silk cover.

Then slowly, in a sort of darkness, his anger subsided, his rebellion relinquished its hold upon his heart-strings and his mind. A feeling slowly came over him that he must rest, sleep. The gush of delirium passed and a great peace encompassed him and took its place.

How tired he was of this merciless attack of the world. How tired he was of everything, though somehow he no longer hated or desired anything. What mattered the money that was pouring in from Hastings? Instead, he just felt sorry—sorry for the world of people, who must struggle so to live, sorry for the young and the old who toiled and hoped and dared the vulturing demands of the pitiless, circumambient city.

It was over an hour later that Leonard rose slowly and undressed, for a surging weakness had come over him. Then he crept in between the cold sheets. He no longer suffered. Reasoning and reflection quite drowned out every bodily supplication.

He just was filled with pity; he felt sorry for all the young people, with their worn expressions and eager faces, who must toil to sustain themselves. They passed in front of his mind like a procession . . . all the young girls whose joyful faces covered their anxiety and fear for the future . . . all the Fanchons . . . he felt sorry for men like himself who had to be amused . . . who tried to retrieve youth.

Oh, pity! Pity!

He thought:

"I love all of you, you poor people of this world . . . my dear, lovely, darling little friends. I know how you are suffering. I know how your beautiful bodies ache and you dance and try to entice us poor bent-over fools. I know how you are suffering. And my head is bowed. Pity us, for there is a wall between us and happiness. Oh, please listen to me. I love you all. I have been so selfish. I've never had compassion for my fellow-beings. And I am lying here prostrated in this bed, stricken; yes, forgotten, unhallowed . . . and a million men are following me. Oh, you fools, you men, who are sleeping, listen to me, you will love me for it when I am gone. . . ."

CHAPTER XLI

THE cleaning maid found Leonard the next morning in a semi-unconscious state, and with the manager, and a bell-boy, he was roused sufficiently to ask them to send for Jennie.

It seemed that the process that had gone on in his cataleptic mind had resulted in a definite demand for his first wife, like the filtrated sediment brought down in a chemist's laboratory.

They sent out to Hastings for her, and it was not more than three hours later that she began a vigil at his bedside that lasted without interruption for three days. Hour after hour, she sat by him and held his palsied hand.

Once, on the second day, he roused himself and said:

"Jennie, Jennie, you're here, dear? I'm so glad."

And she answered, a prayer of thankfulness springing up within her:

"Yes, my beloved, I am here."

His eyes remained closed as he asked:

"Why—are you so good to me, dear Jennie?"

She turned away, though she knew that he would not perceive her tears through the veil over his consciousness.

She breathed a reply.

"Because I love you so, I guess."

She could hear just a faint murmur escape from him.

"Things are funny, aren't they?"

. . . Leonard regained his health gradually after the

third day. At the end of the week, he was able to sit up in a chair by the window.

And Jennie was by him at all times. She took a room at the end of the hall and had some clothes brought from Hastings. She appeared determined to restore his health and went about her task with sparkling eyes and freshened cheeks. It was as if all her slumbering love had been lying dormant, waiting for this opportunity, waiting for the call that some day was to come from him again.

For now there was a youthful flush on her pale cheeks and Leonard perceived a radiance firing her tired blue eyes. No longer did she move about slowly with the old phlegmatic precision. Instead, she went about quietly, ecstatically, noiselessly soothing his brow, or brushing his hair with a touch faintly perceptible.

And Leonard responded, apparently emerging out of the cataclysm that had stormed him, with a new vision. He took her hands and regarded her silently. Somehow, he found himself able now to look past the wrinkles about her eyes and see the love-light hidden there, to glimpse past the silvery hair at her temples into her very soul.

And he cried:

"Oh, Jennie, am I finding out for the first time what is the real truth? Have I had to wait this long to know how wonderful you are?"

His voice quite broke as he turned away and exclaimed: "Jennie, dear one, forgive me. I've been so unknowing."

She murmured back, not able to hide the swelling emotion of her feelings:

"Lennie—my Lennie boy. I'm so happy. I knew you'd realise—some day—if I just waited long enough."

While in Leonard's mind there rose a vision of a lonely man—an alien in the world of men, come back—a victim of vain seeking, of starved imagination, of egotism—a man of one race with those who roam the lonely highways of the world . . . rescued just as the whirlpool was sucking him under.

He turned to Jennie.

"Jennie, dear girl," he sighed, "I've been terribly unhappy and now—" it seemed difficult for him to word his thoughts—"now I just find myself happy in planning to make you happy."

"Lennie dear," she breathed.

He went on:

"Just to make you happy, Jennie. Think of it! Tell me what I can do for you. I deserve your pity more than you know. What a pathetic thing it is when a man must get to my age before he gets to the great truth, before he finds out the joy of waking up to the understanding that one must think of some one else. I have always been seeking, seeking——" He looked away from her and broke into a cry, "God pity me!" But when she tried to shut him off by affectionately placing her fingers over his pale, trembling lips, he pushed them away gently, firmly. "No. Let me go on. I've been seeking, Jennie—even begging for just a morsel of other people's pleasure and always wondering because it didn't fit me. Yes, that's my story, Jennie, day in and day out, as far back as I can remember." Now he faltered: "A few days ago—one night—I found myself actually happy at placing the last rose-scented ashes on the grave of my buried hopes—for all time. And now you've come and shown me what is the greatest thing in life." He reached out

and took her hand and kissed it, humbly, devoutly. "Jennie," he begged, "you still—care for me?"

She almost burst into tears with her frantic answer:

"I love you, Leonard—with all my heart. I've always loved you—from the first day we met."

She put her handkerchief to her shining eyes. "My only fear was—that maybe you'd call me too late." Looking at him, as if daring to face him for the first time, she cried: "But, oh, thank God—you knew I was waiting!"

Leonard could not keep his eyes from her as she talked. Somehow she seemed much younger and he saw that he had been a fool, indeed, for a good many years. Her face was actually attractive. The circles of care about her eyes and the tiredness about her lips, which formerly had been so noticeable, all seemed to be erased and in their place was a new expression—an expression infinitely younger, as if the glory of her consummated love were shining through as the sun imperceptibly works its way down to earth through a heavy fog.

The following morning, complete readjustment had taken place. As they ate their lunch he told her what he had gone through the night of his illness, following his adventure at the café.

Jennie's hands went to her heart as she listened to the man she loved, while Leonard spoke seriously, reverently, a sermon in miniature on the mount of his unfortunate past. He told her of the smashed mirror, of his drinking, his collapse on the bed.

"Then something snapped in me," he said. "I just went to sleep, and in my sleep the selfish part of me died."

Jennie moved to protest, even framed a cry against his

speaking so cruelly of himself. But his words kept her silent.

"Yes, I just died. Every drop of me that used to count is gone. I am through with the old scheme. I'm new because my soul is new. My body doesn't count any more, so its growing old can't bother me. That's what I've learnt. My body can age, but I own my soul, now and forever. I've dug the grave for my poor foolish body and the thoughts it carried, and buried it. I'm emancipated, Jennie, free, and I'm going to love you and you—you'll love me, won't you?"

Jennie was enthralled. "Love you!" she cried. "Why, I love you with every breath of me as long as I live." She had to wait some time before she could go on wording what she wanted to say. Then she controlled herself. She took his fingers and entwined them within her own. Earnestly she said: "You know I had to go through just what you had to get free. That's why I was able to wait for you. That's why my love didn't die." She looked up. "We've never talked like this, have we, Leonard?"

He corrected her. "We've never talked at all, Jennie."

"Well, I loved you so in the old days. I never thought about anything else but just what I could see. I was contented with a nice home and contented more with your handsome looks. But after you left me, I grew to wondering if that was all there was to life. You see I had to," she broke off. Then she went on even more quietly: "I learnt a good deal after that, Leonard. I was alone so much and watched you all the time—watched you go through—oh, Leonard, so many mistakes. I just had to realise that one of us was wrong. But my love for you grew all the time. That was the strange part of it."

She stopped short, breathless from the excitement of her confession.

And as Leonard watched her he murmured, studying her eyes closely:

"Just to think that I couldn't know."

Then he rose and walked over towards the window, swaying from emotion as he walked, as if he were reeling under an overwhelming revelation. He was at the window some moments before he said, without turning:

"No, I couldn't know, Jennie. I just had to learn—this way."

In another moment she, too, rose from the table and joined him at the window. Putting her arm around his shoulders, she stood looking down with him at the restless Broadway crowd below them. "Anyway, Leonard, you're not dead," she murmured slowly. "You're alive for the first time, maybe. Maybe we've found real life—for the first time."

Reaching up, she drew his face down to her.

"Leonard! My husband!" she cried.

His arms encircled her and crushed her to him as he answered, full of emotion:

"Jennie—Jennie!"

CHAPTER XLII

THEY went down into the main dining-room for dinner. Jennie could hardly contain herself from the joy of being with Leonard again, while he, perceiving the joy he gave her, was also actually happy.

As they sat down, he said to her: "Jennie, this is fine, isn't it?" And he patted her hand across the table. From the fathomless expression in her eyes, she might have been peering back in defiance across the ocean of time that no longer would ever separate them. She was just happy—happy. Turning to Leonard after he had ordered the meal, she exclaimed:

"Let's make this our honeymoon, Leonard—the beginning of our journey into a different life."

He was about to answer her when the orchestra started up a soft crooning melody, carried mostly by the violins. For some time they were held by the pliant strains, only looking at each other with a deep silence. Then the music quietened, a fusillade of sharp high notes came from the horns, the drum began a quick crackling rhythm, the bass notes of the larger horns became loud and sonorous, and for a time their entire attention was held by the musical director. But soon the violins crept back with their singing, swaying music like sheep stealing in between herds of cattle; the blatant sounds softened back into melody again and Jennie looked up at Leonard. Full of elation, she exclaimed:

"Isn't this just wonderful, Leonard?" Then another thought came to her. "You make a request," she said, "just for you and me." She thought on for a moment. "Ask them to play something they used to play for us."

"Do you know the Scheherezade?" But he choked off the sentence as a swift pang of recollection shot through him. However, she did not seem to notice and he was intensely relieved when she called to the waiter who was standing at her side: "Have them play one of those Indian Love Lyrics." Turning to Leonard she added:

"You'll love it, dear."

As she spoke a curtain of sadness seemed to drop across her face, offering an especially unfavourable contrast to two young girls whom Leonard now perceived were taking the next table. The taller of the two was exceptionally pretty, her full cheeks and tall figure had the inviting perfection of desirous youth. The other was not so unusual-looking, but her gown fitted her trimly and there was an arrangement of it over her breasts and shoulders that revealed a fulness which Leonard noticed for the first time was lacking now in Jennie.

Then Leonard shifted his gaze and, calling the waiter, ordered a bottle of wine. Somehow his words, "Pommery —Simple Sec." actually frightened him with a shaft of reminiscence he could not explain.

For a minute or more he sought for the answer, while better to veil his thoughts from Jennie he lost himself in observing the people crowd into the dining-room, fluttering and hunting for reservations with their knowing glances at the head-waiter.

Then he exclaimed: "Jen, I wonder why people don't think more. I used to come in here every day and yet to-night is the first time that I seem to see a sort of fatality hanging over everybody—" he corrected himself, "everybody but you and me."

"You mean——" she interrupted.

"Oh, that we're probably the only ones in the room

who have discovered the true—essence of life—and discarded everything else. Every one here is so anxiously eating or trying to make an impression or flirting—or lying. Oh, it's pitiable! People are their own assassins of pleasure."

He stopped his harangue to which Jennie listened with an adoring interest. From where he sat he caught a vision under a chair of a pair of deliciously formed brown silk-clad ankles. He had to grope in his mind for some time before he could gather his thoughts again. Jennie brought him back, saying:

"Leonard, I'll make you forget all the lonesome days. And we'll be awfully happy, won't we?"

He looked at her vaguely. The music had started up and bothered him queerly. But he managed:

"You bet we will, my dear."

While a fleeting wish stole through his mind that he might be able, by some magic, to smooth away the wrinkles he saw about her love-hungry eyes and make of them a better contrast to the soft glances of the girl facing him. However, he fought off the thought in the instant and Jennie was relieved to see his face brighten again, and to hear him say: "I tell you what we'll do. As soon as dinner is over, we'll drive down and hear the opera."

This was a new thought and immediately both busied themselves in ascertaining what the bill was at the Metropolitan. At last Jennie found from the "caption" that it was "Carmen" with Alda in the title rôle.

"I'm sorry it isn't Farrar," Leonard said, "but it'll be interesting just the same."

It was a quarter-past eight, Leonard observed, when they rose from the table and he suggested to Jennie that she go upstairs and get her wraps.

"While you're going up I'll get a cigar," he said, indeed perplexed (although he would not let the full truth of it reveal itself) that he should prefer to stay down in the lobby and watch the crowds.

He took her to the bronze elevator doors, remarking as he placed her in one of the cages about to ascend:

"Hurry down, dear, won't you?"

But on his way into the lobby again, he could not dispose of the thought that she had scrutinised him in a quizzical sort of way, as if to say, "You could have come up with me."

He walked through the lobby slowly towards the cigar-stand, possessed by a feeling of momentary freedom that he no longer stopped to analyse.

It was queer, too, that just as he passed the desk the two girls from the dining-room should brush by him as they hurried out toward the revolving door. In fact—he could not be sure of it—the younger one seemed to let her beautiful eyes cross his glance, in a fleeting look of recognition. It took some control of his will to keep from walking out toward the door after them.

He was in a daze until he found himself at the cigar-stand, asking the dark-eyed young woman back of the counter for a "Bock Panetela."

"A very light one," he said kindly.

Then he noticed that she was a new girl, one that he had never seen before. Also she had a shyness about her that was indeed attractive.

As he lit his cigar, he asked: "You're new here?"

She smiled. "Yes, worked at the Van Nuys in Albany, only came down last night."

As she talked she had a way of leaning across the glass case in a manner that displayed two beautifully formed

forearms. Also Leonard observed that her skin was soft and of a very fine texture.

Then he looked up, as if by some prescience, and saw Jennie coming across the lobby, searching for him with her tired-looking eyes. Quickly he paid the girl, wished her "Good-night," to which she responded with a sweetness that bespoke at once both invitation and regret, and hurried off. When he reached Jennie's side he noticed that she anxiously searched his face. "Leonard, I thought I had lost you, dear," she exclaimed.

"I was just buying a cigar," he answered. A certain resentment swept over him and rather forcibly, as if some long inert savagery had beset him, he took her arm and turned her toward the door.

But it was not until they were out under the white arcs of the hotel entrance and getting into the waiting limousine that he noticed how pale and drawn she was. For the instant a thought racked him that perhaps she was trying to discover the emotions that were charging with unrest his mind and soul. They were seated in the car, however, and driving toward the Metropolitan before he heard Jennie question his silence. "Leonard, you have gotten so quiet—all of a sudden. What's the trouble, dear?"

He continued to lean on his cane and stare out of the window at the gaily passing crowds, allowing his eyes melancholically to search each passing face. He could hardly keep himself from turning resentfully on the anxious eyes and quivering mouth that he knew were begging at his side. At last he answered her.

"I've got a little headache," he said. "I'll be all right in a few minutes."

THE END

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